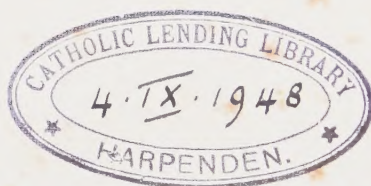


*The
Wrong Murder Mystery*

Charles Barry



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THE WRONG MURDER MYSTERY

The death of James Murdoch, leader writer on *The Epoch*, appeared to be due to natural causes, and but for the curious mentality of the criminal would have been so considered by all concerned. The efforts of doctors and priests, journalists and detectives, were then pooled in order to discover the identity of the criminal and prevent further murder. Gilmartin, Mr. Barry's popular detective, again emerges from his retirement to lend a hand, and it is his knowledge of human nature as much as his investigations and those of the other detectives which leads to the desired results—the capture of the killer and the happiness of his would-be victims.

A story for all those who like food for thought as well as really good entertainment. "The Wrong Murder Mystery" is a super-performance in the field of modern detective-story writing.

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The Moul's House Mystery
The Witness at the Window
The Detective's Holiday
The Smaller Penny
Mixed Cargo (with E. W. SAVI)

THE WRONG MURDER MYSTERY

by
CHARLES BARRY

5th Thousand



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THE characters in this story are entirely fictitious and no reference to any living person is made or implied.

CHAPTER I

“ EUTHANASIA ”

MR. JUSTICE PREEMBY was summing up.

“ The prisoner, Elisabeth Clifford,” he was saying to the jury, “ has, while pleading not guilty of murder, admitted the fact that she administered to her aunt Millicent Rabjohns a poisonous substance which was the immediate cause of death. You have heard eminent Counsel’s arguments on behalf of the prisoner, arguments which express the contention that she was justified, or at least excusable, in doing what she did. You have heard that Millicent Rabjohns was suffering from an incurable disease which, according to the medical evidence given here, would have had a fatal termination in the course of a few days or, at any rate, weeks. The prisoner, a nurse by profession, has given evidence on her own behalf in which she has declared on oath that her aunt, who was in great suffering, begged her to give her immediate and painless death or, to use the phrase she is alleged to have employed, ‘ to put her out of her misery.’ The prisoner on her own admission was moved with pity and compassion to the extent of obeying this request. Counsel, as I have already said, has in an eloquent appeal to your feelings pleaded justification for this act. Counsel for the prosecution has told you, however, that English law does not admit the validity of such a plea in the circumstances in question. I feel bound to tell you that I agree with Counsel for the prosecution.”

A flippant young barrister in the seats opposite the jury-box nudged his nearest colleague and turned his thumbs up significantly.

"Preemby's going to give us one of his circuses," he whispered.

Mr. Justice Preemby went on:

"The law of England does, of course, in certain circumstances admit the plea of justifiable homicide, but the facts as shown by the evidence in this case do not constitute circumstances of the kind envisaged. Personally, I may add, I am of opinion that the law should be amended. I hold that it should be made legal for a qualified person, a medical man, for example, to inflict death—painless death—on those suffering from an incurable disease. I should like to see, however, this power surrounded with a number of adequate safeguards, for no doubt the practice would, without these, be open to abuse on the part of evilly disposed persons. The consent of the person concerned, given before a magistrate, would be one safeguard which I would suggest. I can even imagine cases where I should legalise euthanasia for persons not actually suffering from disease. I am aware that the religious bodies of this country will probably not agree with this opinion and that they will in all probability take exception to it, but—ahem!—we are not governed in this country by the ecclesiastical authorities—yet."

Counsel for the Crown looked at his brother for the defence, and two pairs of eyebrows were raised. In the look exchanged there was, in spite of the difference in their positions at the moment, unequivocal disapproval of the unjudicial tone and substance of the judge's remarks. His Honour gave no sign whether he had noticed anything or not, but with a dexterity born of long practice he switched back to the matter in hand and instructed

the jury with apparent fairness in the law governing murder, manslaughter, justifiable and excusable homicide.

“You can, of course,” he said in his concluding sentence, “exercise your power of bringing in a verdict of manslaughter even though you may have been told that this is murder or nothing.”

That evening the three London evening paper gave the incident all the prominence in their news columns that might have been expected from the manner and place of the utterance and from the identity and position of the speaker. Placards were all over the Metropolitan area shouting in various colours:

JUDGE FAVOURS EUTHANASIA

JURY DISAGREE

You had to buy the papers themselves to find out that the jury disagreed, not with the judge, but among themselves as to the verdict, and that the unfortunate Elisabeth Clifford was faced with another trial.

The morning papers of the following day were equally vociferous. With more time to spare they gave the matter at least equal space and display. The more “popular” ones, for the benefit of those of their readers who might have thought that euthanasia was the title of a new film or the name of a new continent, explained the term in simple language, and gave its Greek derivation for the satisfaction of those of a more inquisitive turn of mind. Some of them printed interviews with well-known medical men, churchmen of various denominations, and with that appearance of impartiality which is the most dangerous kind of propaganda gave a great deal of prominence to the opinions of those of them who agreed with the “learned judge.”

All except the *Epoch*!

The *Epoch* ignored the matter that day except for the usual concise report of the trial, but in the afternoon there was a meeting in the editor's room.

"We can't ignore this euthanasia business completely," Beckett, the editor-in-chief, declared. "The penny papers are playing it up for all they're worth, and *we* have already had half a dozen letters on the subject."

"What sort of letters?" one of the men present asked.

"All sorts," the editor replied; "some of them agreeing with Preemby, but the best of them disagree very forcibly. There's a damn good one from let's see, what's his name?—a Monsignor Byers. You're a Holy Roman, Murdoch—who is he?"

The man addressed—a stocky little figure surmounted by an unruly thatch of red hair—looked from some papers he was reading.

"Monsignor Byers?" he echoed, and there was a Doric roll in his "r's," while a slightly adenoidal intonation betrayed the fact that he was suffering from a cold. "Well, I'd say he was one of the three verra best theologians alive to-day."

"H'm!" the editor said, and handed over the letter. "A useful sort of johnnie! You'd better read what he says."

While Murdoch was reading, another man—a lanky individual who, with his colourless hair and pale eyes, might have looked a nonentity until you saw his expression when speaking—addressed the editor-in-chief.

"I presume," he said, "that you have called us together either to announce the paper's policy in this matter or to get our opinion on it."

"Both," was the reply. "The paper's policy is a definite one, Barshott, but I should like to think that we have our staff—or that part of it which matters—wholeheartedly with us. The guv'nor and

I have had a talk this morning and this meeting is the result. So if you gentlemen will tell me your opinions on this euthanasia business I'll announce the policy. You, being the junior, Barshott, might begin by letting us know what you think.”

“My opinion is definite,” the lanky one declared, “as definite as that of the paper, whatever it is. Independently of the fact that I hate personally all these so-called modern ideas on divorce, sterilisation of the unfit, euthanasia, and the rest that usually goes with these, we are a family newspaper, a newspaper which is read by the middle-class Christian people of this country, the class which, whatever may be said against it, is, taken by and large and independently of its religious beliefs, instinctively a very good judge of what is morally right and wrong. This class, I say from my knowledge of it, is shocked by Preemby's opinions, and we ought to support it if only because it is this class which is the mainstay of the paper.”

Barshott looked around, rather conscious of the feeling he had put into his words. The editor merely nodded and look at another man. This individual was sucking a pipe and looking out of the window. He felt rather than saw the editor's look and turned towards the others.

“Ye want ma opeenion?” he asked, and there was no mistaking the fact that he was a fellow-countryman of Murdoch. “Weel, as ye probably all know, A'm a bit o' a rationalist—though I prefer to think A'm an agnostic—an' my opeenions on all the things Barshott's been talkin' aboot aren't verra acceptable maybe to the Great Meedle Class o' this country. But A'm a journalist, ferrst, last an' all the time, an' A think we ought to go for Preemby for all we're worth—no' because o' his opeenions on—heh—euthanasia, but because o' the abuse o' his poseetion as a judge. There's been far too much lately o' this *ex cathedrâ* talk from

judges and magistrates and coroners and the like who've got fads an' fancies they want to air, an' do it from the bench where nobody can answer back an' tell them to confine themselves to admeenisterin' the law. It's up tae us to tell them that. That's my conception o' a journalist's job."

"I agree with you, Mac," said another man, "and for the same reasons."

Two others agreed in similar terms.

The editor smiled and looked over at Murdoch, who had finished reading the letter from Monsignor Byers.

"There's no need to ask your opinion, Murdoch," he said.

"No," laughed Murdoch's "rationalist-agnostic" fellow-countryman. "There's one thing ye can always be sure o' in a Papist. Evera one o' them has the same opeenions as evera other one on a matter o' this kind."

"That is so, Mac," Murdoch replied good-humouredly. "In matters of faith and morals we're One—with a big 'O'. You see, old chap, *Truth is only one*. You can't have half a dozen opinions about it. I'd like to write that with a stylus on your rationalistic old skull."

He sneezed.

"Hang this cold," he said; "I feel I'm in for a real snorter this time. However, to answer your question, Beckett, I think that our policy should be to attack Preemby for the reasons Mac has given, and to attack the substance of his remarks for the reason which Barshott has given—and for a few others which for the present I'll keep to myself. Frankly I feel rather strongly on the matter, but I'd rather write it than say it."

"You shall," the editor-in-chief declared, "for your opinion is that of the paper. I'm very glad that you, as our chief leader-writer, feel as you do

about it, for we count on you to give Mr. Justice Preemby the trouncing of his life.”

“Heh,” laughed Mac, “by the look in Jimmy Murdoch’s eye O’m thinkin’ he’ll get it.”

“The look in my eye, Mac, is fever,” Murdoch said. “Ever since that malaria I got down in the Black Sea, a cold is worse than blackwater fever to me. However, we shall do our best to oblige! If Mr. Justice Preemby feels comfortable when we’re done with him, I’ll be very surprised.”

“Well,” the editor said as he rose to his feet, “I hope your cold won’t be as bad as all that, old man, at any rate till you’ve given us a start with that leader of yours.”

“Don’t worry; I’ll write it, never fear.”

James Murdoch wrote that leader—and more besides—with a temperature of a hundred and four.

A week later he was dead.

The death certificate, signed by his friend and medical adviser, Christopher Marsden, stated that his death was due to pneumococcal septicaemia!

CHAPTER II

AN ANONYMOUS LETTER

“ To quote the words of His Holiness to *Unitas*, the twenty-first anniversary of whose foundation we are celebrating here to-night: ‘ When a journal consecrates itself to the apostolate of truth and virtue for the good of souls and for the greater glory of God and of His Church, there is no blessing which it does not merit.’ That there is always need for such a journal is evident. Look around you and what do you see? Newspapers whose professed object it is to entertain, inform and educate the people of this country advocating brazenly a return to pagan practices, such as ‘ euthanasia ’—a beautiful word for a particularly objectionable form of murder—— ”

A voice: “ Not all the papers ! ”

“ True, not all of them. All honour and blessing, therefore, to the exceptions. In this respect let us pay tribute to the memory of a Catholic journalist lately passed away to a better life, whose trenchant pen was always at the service of truth and virtue. I refer to James Murdoch, who, practically with the hand of a dying man, wrote the incisive and masterly columns which put in their proper place and perspective the utterances of a certain public figure whose name I certainly do not intend to mention in these surroundings. Let me add, by the way, that it is an open secret that our late friend has been succeeded in his campaign for virtue and truth by another equally valiant upholder of these qualities.

He is not of our fold—yet! We are proud, however, to have him here among us to-night as the guest of our editor.”

All eyes were turned to where a blushing lanky figure sat on the right-hand side of Mr. Deacon, the bearded editor of *Unitas*, and then a cheer broke out. John Barshott fingered the crumbs on the tablecloth in embarrassment and threw a reproachful look at the Archbishop whose words had caused the outburst. Then he rose and bowed awkwardly. The Archbishop—one of England’s best preachers and after-dinner speakers—continued his oration in lighter vein.

Half an hour later the diners at the banquet to celebrate the “coming of age” of *Unitas* had broken up into little groups. At the main table three men remained in their seats—Deacon, the editor of *Unitas*, his friend Barshott, now chief leader-writer of the *Epoch*, and a priest. The last-named was of the type that is usually called “youngish” whatever their age. He was fair and clear-skinned, and were it not for the fact that there is an age below which Catholic priests are not usually ordained, a casual observer would have taken him for a youth in his very early twenties. He was as a matter of actual fact an experienced parish priest of one of the “toughest” parishes in London. With one elbow on the table he was turned towards Barshott.

“So you are Barshott?” he said. “I’ve heard a lot about you from poor old Jimmy Murdoch.”

“We were great friends,” said Barshott simply, “ever since I first came to London as a raw youth.”

Deacon leaned over.

“I happen to know, Father Austin,” he volunteered, “that Murdoch’s last words to Beckett, his editor, were to ask him to give Barshott his job.”

“I didn’t know that,” Barshott replied, “but it

doesn't surprise me. I owe all I am and have to Jimmy. We had the same ideas on so many things too."

"Was that your article in yesterday's *Epoch*," the priest asked—"the one on Modern Paganism?"

"Yes."

"Good stuff!"

Barshott looked all round him as if to assure himself that nobody was listening.

"Look here, you two!" he said then, leaning forward on the table and pushing back the empty glasses from before him. "I think you are the very people I need just now. You, Father, are a priest, presumably with a knowledge of the world and of its—er—frailties, while you, Deacon, are an old journalist who's been through a lot in the course of his life. I want advice."

"Anything I can do——" the priest began.

"If it's a spiritual difficulty," Deacon laughed, "and from the start it sounds like one, I'll take a back seat while Father Austin is here."

"It's a spiritual difficulty all right if you like," Barshott replied, "but not of the sort you seem to think. On the other hand it may not be a difficulty at all."

Father Austin lit a cigarette.

"Let's hear," he said.

Barshott took from his pocket an envelope.

"Look at this," he said, placing it on the table in front of him.

His two companions leaned over and read:

JOHN BARSHOTT, ESQ.

c/o The *EPOCH*,

CAXTON HOUSE SQUARE, E.C.4.

"Nothing very remarkable about that," Deacon commented.

"Except," said Father Austin, "that it is written in block capitals throughout by a person who is accustomed to write in block capitals. I suspect an anonymous letter."

"How do you know that it has been written by somebody who is accustomed to write in block capitals?" the editor asked.

"You try asking your wife—no, you haven't got one—well, your sister, to address an envelope in block capitals, and you'll see what I mean. There is an amateurishness in all ordinary attempts which is unmistakable and which you don't see in this. However, I may be wrong. I presume that it is the enclosure that matters."

"I thought I'd show you the envelope first," Barshott replied, "for I came to the same conclusions as you, Father Austin, but as you say, it is the enclosure that's interesting. It is also in block capitals."

He drew out of the envelope a single sheet of quarto-size paper folded in four and flattened it out on the table. The priest read aloud:

"John Barshott, this is to warn you that unless you discontinue your attacks on progress as manifested by enlightened opinion on euthanasia, contraception, sterilisation of the mentally unfit, and divorce, you will die the same death as that which removed your friend James Murdoch from the staff of the 'Epoch' and from this world."

The words "the same death" were thickly underlined. There was no signature.

"But," Deacon said explosively, "that's utter rubbish! Some madman has written that! Jimmy Murdoch died of pneumonia!"

"Pneumococcal septicaemia," the priest corrected. "I was with him when he died."

"Same thing for all practical purposes," Deacon replied, "only worse."

"Much worse," the priest confirmed with an emphatic nod, "much worse. A very painful death."

"Then you think," Barshott enquired, "that there is nothing in this?"

"Nothing at all," Deacon declared.

"With all due respect to your opinion, Deacon," Father Austin said, "I don't agree."

"For heaven's sake, why?" the editor asked. "To me it is obvious that the writer of this is either playing a practical joke in very poor taste, or he is mad."

"The practical joke is possible," Father Austin admitted, "in fact, it must be seriously considered, but there are other points as well."

"May we hear them, Father?" Barshott asked.

"In the first place, there is the matter of the block capitals," the priest said. "That, of course, might be the act of a practical joker. My main point, however, is this: How many people outside your paper, Barshott, knew, until His Lordship let it out this evening, that Murdoch wrote those articles and leaders on the Preemby business?"

"Oh, most journalists of any consequence in Fleet Street," Barshott replied. "You don't keep these things secret except from the general public."

"How many people know that you are carrying on his work on the same lines?" Father Austin went on.

"Same answer as before," Barshott replied. "There's no particular secret about it."

"Precisely," the priest declared, "therefore the writer of this letter is one of those in the know."

"Then you may be sure that it's a practical joker," Deacon insisted, "some fellow, probably, on the *Epoch* staff itself."

"I agree with you that it is possible," Father Austin admitted, "but there are two or three things against it. The first is that a member of the *Epoch* staff, accustomed to journalistic English, would not write like that. 'Progress as manifested by enlightened opinion', is not journalese, bad as journalese is. 'You will die the same death as that which removed your friend', is another phrase which no journalist would use."

"Wouldn't he?" the editor asked grimly, remembering some of the stuff he had blue-pencilled in the course of his career.

"I don't think so," the priest insisted, "and besides, why should a journalist write in block capitals when he has the choice of a few dozen typewriters?"

"Oh, typewriters can be traced just as easily as handwriting nowadays," Deacon argued.

"I agree," said Father Austin, "but whereas in a large office anybody may use practically any typewriter, handwriting even of block capitals is highly individual, and consequently traceable directly to the person doing it. When you have traced a typewriter you have not necessarily traced its user. Any journalist will know how difficult it is to trace who used a particular machine to type a particular piece of work in a large office like that of the *Epoch*."

"Where does all this lead?" Barshott asked.

"Nowhere in particular," the priest replied, "but it does seem to me that it would be very unwise to ignore this production entirely."

"It's difficult to see what one can do about it," Barshott said.

"M'm! M'm!" Deacon muttered, pulling at the strands of his fair beard. "I—don't—know. I don't know! The threat contained in this is simply ridiculous. You say yourself, Father, that you were present when Jimmy died, and you have no doubt that he died of pneumococcal septicaemia. Now how on earth can anybody fulfil a threat to cause Barshott to die 'the same death'."

"That beats me too," Barshott said.

"I'm not so sure," Father Austin murmured.

"Who was Jimmy's doctor?" Deacon asked.

"A man called Marsden," Father Austin replied, "a good doctor, and, I believe, a good man. As a matter of fact I always call him in when I have anything wrong with me, and I often meet him at sick-beds—deathbeds too."

"He's my doctor too," Barshott added. "A very good doctor indeed, absolutely competent and devoted to his profession."

"That is how he has always struck me," the priest declared, "though I must say that I disagree with a good many of his ideas."

"He is a believer in this euthanasia business," Barshott volunteered. "He told me when Jimmy was suffering at the last that it was a clear case for putting him out painlessly."

"He made a similar remark to me," Father Austin said, "though he qualified it by saying that

the present-day ethics of the medical profession made it impossible."

"H'm! . . . Do doctors always observe the ethics of their profession?" Deacon asked.

"Marsden does," Barshott replied: "I once discussed the question with him over the Doctor James case. You remember, Deacon, when James was tried for the murder of that girl?"

"I remember."

"Well," Barshott went on, "I asked him his opinion of that, and he said that James was not only a fool but a criminal fool."

"That doesn't mean much," Deacon declared, "but—hang it, you're not accusing this Marsden fellow of killing Jimmy Murdoch, are you?"

"No," Father Austin replied, "there isn't enough basis for that, but—every possibility is to be considered in view of this letter. To be perfectly frank, I'd be more inclined to believe Marsden capable out of pity of putting Murdoch out of his awful suffering than to think him capable of writing that letter. A good man might do the one, but he couldn't do the other."

"I agree with you," said Barshott.

"Hello," Deacon exclaimed, "nearly everybody has gone into the other room. John McCormack is singing there. Let's go and hear him."

They rose.

"Let me have that letter, Barshott," Father Austin asked as they walked down the banqueting-hall; "I'll let you have it back if you want it. I'd like to show it to a detective friend of mine and get his opinion."

Barshott handed over the letter somewhat unwillingly.

"I don't want any fuss made," he said, "in case it really is a practical joke. The police might start a hare and make a laughing-stock of me—not that that would matter, but the paper would suffer."

"You needn't worry about that," the priest told him; "the man I am going to see has retired from the C.I.D. You may have heard of him—a man called Gilmartin."

"Know him?" Barshott replied. "I should jolly well think I do. I met him years ago, long before he was a superintendent. Show him the letter by all means."

CHAPTER III

GILMARTIN ADVISES

THE friendship between Father Austin and ex-Superintendent Gilmartin was not that which sometimes exists between priest and parishioner, but dated back to the days when the former C.I.D. man had been an inspector and the priest a young solicitor's clerk whose spare time was spent on a rostrum of the Catholic Evidence Guild. The hostile attitude of a street-corner mob had been the immediate cause of their first meeting, and the intimacy thus begun had continued throughout the younger man's seminary days and afterwards.

Gilmartin, on his retirement from criminal investigation work, had purchased a little house on the North Cornish coast and professed to find life in that out-of-the-way spot more interesting than the busy hubbub of London, but his metropolitan friends smiled when they discovered that during the winter months the ex-detective often came up to Town and haunted the big buildings on the Embankment where many of his old colleagues still carried on the never-ceasing work of circumventing the wiles of the criminal fraternity. A quiet little hotel in a backwater of Earl's Court was his personal headquarters on these occasions, and it was to this retreat that Father Austin repaired on the morning following the *Unitas* anniversary banquet. He found the big, grizzled man reading his morning paper in the lounge. Their greeting was cordial but not effusive.

"It's a positive wonder to me," Gilmartin said with the slight brogue which had never left him despite his long residence in England, "how all you good people seem to know of my arrival in London within five minutes of it."

"Oh," the priest laughed, "we have our—er—stool-pigeons, you know."

After a few minutes occupied in the usual exchange of questions and answers which follows reunion after even a short absence, Father Austin produced Barshott's letter and recounted to his friend the conversation of the evening before. Gilmartin listened without asking a single question.

"Yes," he said, after making sure that the priest had finished, "it's a curious business, but there isn't a blessed thing we can do about it."

"N-no," Father Austin replied doubtfully, "I suppose not—there's not much one can do, and yet—I don't feel easy in my mind about it."

"Well," the ex-detective said, "I'll be quite frank with you. I think there's nothing in it. I don't know what your experience is of anonymous letters, but mine is pretty extensive and it has brought me to the conclusion that ninety-nine out of a hundred threats sent in this way are never fulfilled—and never intended to be fulfilled."

"This might be the hundredth," the priest argued.

"It might," Gilmartin agreed, "but personally I don't think it is."

"You don't?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because it is so senseless."

"That's precisely what frightens me," Father Austin declared. "It is the work of a fanatic—I can read that between the lines—and fanatics are dangerous, as you very well know."

Gilmartin laughed.

"Yes," he replied, "they are, but I really can't see how a fanatic, however dangerous, can ensure that you or this chap Barshott or anybody else can die of pneumonia. If he had threatened poison, now, or a revolver shot, I might have taken it seriously, but——"

"The point is," the priest interrupted, "did Murdoch really die a natural death?"

"From what you say," Gilmartin answered, "there appears to be no doubt of it. You were present when he actually died, and, I presume, throughout the course of his illness."

Father Austin nodded.

"Yes, I saw him practically every day," he said, "and I saw nothing abnormal, I must admit. It began as these things often do, with an ordinary bronchial catarrh, and developed into pneumonia, the pneumococcal septicaemia set in, and that was the beginning of the end."

"Well, then," Gilmartin asked, "what have you other than this anonymous letter to make you change your mind about it?"

"Nothing; but I am disturbed about it."

"I see. Well, suppose we grant for the sake of argument that Murdoch did not die a natural death! How could it have happened?"

"I cannot imagine, but there is always the possibility of poisoned medicine."

"All right," the detective nodded, "let us take

that. Now, first of all, where was Murdoch during his last illness? In a nursing-home?"

"No, in his own flat."

"Who had access to him?"

"*One*: the doctor, or rather the doctors, for there was more than one at the end. *Two*: myself; *Three*: an old Irishwoman who was very fond of him. *Four* and *Five*: two nurses, one by night and the other by day; then there were others. He was visited, I believe, by several of his journalist friends—Barshott, Deacon, Beckett and no doubt others."

"Very good; let's take them in order. First, the doctor. Is he a likely man to have killed rather than cured Murdoch?"

"No," Father Austin replied emphatically—too emphatically, Gilmartin thought. "I have known Marsden ever since I was ordained and I don't believe him capable of such a thing. He is wrapped up in his profession and to me he appeared really distressed at the turn Murdoch's illness took at the end. He even called in Sir George Matchby."

"And what did Sir George say?"

"Merely confirmed Marsden's diagnosis of pneumococcal septicaemia but gave no hope for recovery. It was too late to do anything."

"I see," Gilmartin said. "Now, Father Austin, tell me why you suspect this doctor of something or other."

"I do not," was the vehement response to this.

"No, perhaps not." Gilmartin agreed. "You haven't got quite so far as actual suspicion yet,

but that will come, especially as you are playing with the idea. Why are you playing with the idea? ”

“ That is hardly fair,” the priest protested. “ I admit that there are perhaps reasons for suspecting Dr. Marsden, but——”

“ Don’t mind the ‘ buts ’,” the detective interrupted. “ What are the reasons? ”

“ They do not seem very adequate—considered in cold blood,” Father Austin declared, “ but the principal one seems to be that he is a strong supporter of the legalisation of this thing they call ‘ euthanasia,’ against which Murdoch came out so strongly.”

“ M’m!” Gilmartin said. “ That would be a very good reason if Marsden were a fanatic or mentally unbalanced. Did he ever strike you as either one or the other? ”

“ I can’t say he did,” Father Austin replied. “ On the contrary he seems to me to be very normally constituted indeed.”

“ Then I’m afraid you’ll have to wash him out as a suspect. It is not very good reasoning to say that a normally constituted man who feels strongly about euthanasia is likely to kill another who has equally strong but opposite opinions on the same subject. Look at the number of people who feel strongly—even fanatically—about the infallibility of the Pope! Yet you don’t hear of murders because of differences on that point.”

“ I could say a lot about that if I liked,” the priest answered, partly with impatience and partly with amusement, “ but I tell you that I do not

suspect Doctor Marsden. I have said to myself all you've said and a lot more."

"All right! Let's leave him and go on to the next on your list of persons who had access to Murdoch."

"That's myself."

"We'll leave you to the last," Gilmartin said. "Who is next? His servant?"

"Poor old Bridget! She is incapable of any such thing, even if she had anything to gain by Jimmy's death—which she hadn't."

"Next? The two nurses? What about them?"

"Total strangers. I know nothing about them except that the night nurse was a Catholic."

"What about visitors? Barshott himself?"

"I don't know."

"H'm!" Gilmartin exclaimed. "You are helpful! Is this Barshott a long lanky individual with mouse-coloured hair?"

"Yes; he said he had met you."

"I know him. A good fellow! Whoever killed Murdoch—if anybody did—Barshott is the last man in the world I'd suspect. It strikes me that, barring accidents, you are the only possible suspect yourself."

"It does look that way," the priest admitted.

"Or Murdoch died a natural death," the detective finished.

"Quite so!"

"Good! Now that allows us to return to our anonymous letter. I ask you again, Father Austin, who but a madman or a practical joker would threaten Barshott with a natural death from pneumococcal septicaemia if he didn't let up on this

anti-euthanasia campaign? I'm inclined to the practical joker idea myself. It's just the sort of thing some young fool of a journalist would think of. It might even be some joker from a rival paper who would like to make a laughing-stock of the *Epoch*. In any case, heaven knows, after the sunless summer that we've had and the funny sort of winter that has followed it and that we're actually having, the odds against death from pneumonia or its complications are not so very long. I'll bet at least one death in every two or three for the next few weeks will be from pneumonia."

"There I agree with you," Father Austin declared. "It's rotten weather. I don't know when I've seen the sun. Then you think that this letter ought to be ignored purely and simply?"

"N-no, I don't think we'd better ignore it completely. Leave it with me. I'll go and have a talk with my old friend Meldrum at the Yard. If he thinks there's anything in it he'll make a few discreet inquiries."

"Barshott didn't want the police in this," the priest demurred. "He seems to be afraid of the very thing you mentioned, that if there is nothing in it the *Epoch* will become a laughing-stock, and that its undoubted influence for good will be lessened."

"Oh, I know it's the sort of thing the penny papers would love to get hold of," Gilmartin laughed, "but Barshott needn't worry. The Yard doesn't give anything away to the Press without a very good reason for it.

After arranging for a further meeting the priest

left. Gilmartin sat alone in the little hotel lounge for several minutes, a smile playing over his face. Then he rose.

"I bet old 'Drum will rise to this," he said to himself.

A few minutes later he was on his way to Scotland Yard. Being still well remembered by everybody, he was not required to fill in the little form at the door; he walked straight up, therefore, to Meldrum's room and opened the door without knocking.

"Hello, Larry!" the big man behind the desk cried. "How are y—— But no, hang it! Go away! When you come with that smile on your face you bring trouble. Go away!"

CHAPTER IV

ANOTHER LETTER

GILMARTIN stayed, and Meldrum—despite the exclamations with which he had first greeted his old friend—enjoyed the experience. The C.I.D. superintendent was one of those big men who go about the world with a lazy good-natured smile as if trying to convince everybody that they are all heart and no brains. There are many criminals in the convict prisons of England who owe their present plight to the fact that they took Meldrum thus at his face value.

He listened without saying a word to the story Gilmartin told. Then he opened the drawer of his desk and took from it an envelope which he placed beside the one from which the Irishman had taken the anonymous letter addressed to Barshott. Gilmartin stared at it, for even to the eye of one who did not pretend to be an expert it was evident that the address in block capitals on each had been penned by the same hand. The second was directed to:

THE COMMISSIONER OF POLICE,
NEW SCOTLAND YARD,
LONDON, S.W.

Meldrum drew from it the enclosure and handed it to Gilmartin, who read:

You think Mr. James Murdoch of the "Epoch" died a natural death, but I can assure you that he did not. There will be more of these deaths if the "Epoch" does not discontinue its campaign against progress.

This was signed "*A Friend of Progress.*"

"When did you get this?" Gilmartin asked.

"Yesterday," Meldrum replied. "What do you think of it?"

"It begins to look like a curious business."

"Yes," the superintendent said, "it is at least that. Now, when the Commissioner passed this letter on to me I didn't take it very seriously, as you can imagine—you know how many anonymous letters we get. This story of yours puts a new complexion on the matter."

"Just as your letter puts a new complexion on mine," Gilmartin added.

"Quite!" Meldrum replied. "Now, I have an idea that your priestly friend is right in taking the matter seriously."

"It certainly looks like it," the Irishman agreed.

"What's to be done about it!"

"Oh, the usual thing, I suppose, the big superintendent sighed, "the usual thing. We'll have to waste the time of perfectly good detectives and others making all sorts of inquiries about people who might, could, would, or should have killed Murdoch. And then we shall probably find that some neurotic product of modern civilisation wrote these silly letters just because she got a kick out of it."

"I should have thought," Gilmartin said, "that the first thing to do is to find out whether Murdoch was killed or not."

"How are we going to do that?"

"Exhumation and autopsy, of course."

"Oh! Yes!" Meldrum exclaimed. "Just like that! Exhumation and autopsy! Now, I ask you!

What would the Home Secretary say if we went to him with these two anonymous letters and asked him to grant permission for exhumation on the strength of them? "

"The present Home Secretary would grant it," Gilmartin laughed. "I saw a paragraph the other day which said that he was a great reader of detective stories."

"So are you, to judge by the way you are talking," his former colleague retorted.

"No, but seriously, 'Drum," Gilmartin said, "I think you ought to try it in any case. Only an hour ago I was pooh-poohing the whole business, but I'm all the other way now. I really think there's something serious in this."

"So do I," Meldrum replied, "but I'm hanged if I know what it is or where to look for it. You seemed to think that this Doctor Marsden fellow is a possible suspect, and yet he gets a good character from your priest, who obviously has his doubts too. From what you have heard, Marsden seems to be a normal sort of chap. The fact that he is in favour of euthanasia stunts doesn't imply anything morally or mentally wrong with him."

"Well, I, for one," Gilmartin declared, "consider the idea of euthanasia morally wrong."

"So, for that matter, do I. So does the law," Meldrum replied, "but that is because you as a Catholic and I as a good Wesleyan have been brought up in the idea of the sanctity of human life. The law itself is based on the Christian idea of that sanctity. But then you know Larry, that in these times a good many very honourable and estimable people have been brought up not on Christian

principles at all, but on pagan, materialistic lines, and to them the idea of human suffering from illness or any other cause is more abhorrent than the idea of ending that suffering by legalised painless death. Mind you, even we—you and I—would put a bullet in the head of a horse with a broken back, and when you have been brought to look on man as merely an animal whose brain has been developed a bit more than that of the horse, you can't be said to be a moral or mental pervert if you show signs of wanting to apply the same medicine to human beings."

Meldrum stopped with an embarrassed laugh.

"Gosh!" he exclaimed then. "That was a long one for me! But what I'm getting at is this: the person who wrote these letters is not what we would call a normal person. He is, in fact, a fanatic, unbalanced and not particularly intelligent. That is my reading of it. Now, from what you say, this doctor is none of these. He holds views in favour of putting incurable sufferers out of their pain by death, but apparently is such a keen observer of the ethics of his profession that he does not even dream of applying his own theories until they are generally accepted by his colleagues and actually legalised. None of your friends regard him as being anything but normal and balanced. He is intelligent obviously—at any rate intelligent enough not to write letters like these."

"As to that," Gilmartin said, "you may be quite wrong. The letters are silly—especially the one to the Commissioner, but intelligent people often do silly things. Clever people have the most extraordinary kinks both moral and mental. There

is also the type of clever devil who does silly things in order to divert suspicion from himself, convinced that nobody will accuse him of doing a stupid action."

"I agree. What do you propose, then?"

"I have already told you. Have Murdoch's body exhumed in secret. Have Symmons examine it thoroughly. Then if anything is found you can begin your inquiries."

"Yes," Meldrum retorted, "and if we find nothing?"

"Then that settles it. Everything's all right."

"Indeed! Well, Larry, I'm not a pathologist nor a medico-legal bloke, but I could tell you of one or two ways of killing a man so that death seems natural. If I know such things you can bet your boots that Doctor Marsden knows them a lot better."

"You're thinking of sulphonal and things like that."

"I'm thinking of a good many things," Meldrum said. "However, I'll have a talk with the Assistant Commissioner. If he plunks for the exhumation then I'll exhume, but he won't."

"As a matter of fact, 'Drum," Gilmartin replied, "I don't care much either way, but as you were complaining about the waste of men's time in inquiries I suggested exhumation as a means of avoiding that waste."

"I know. I know. We always did argue about the best way to set about a job. We both went our own way in the end and we both got there somehow. Gosh, Larry! I wish you were still working

with us. We had some good times together here at the Yard."

"We had," Gilmartin agreed, "and they're over and done with. It's time you retired, you old ruffian! Come down to Cornwall and live there. We'd have good times there too."

"Ha, ha," Meldrum laughed, "and every other week we'd come back to London for a long sentimental look at this old heap of grey stones they call New Scotland Yard."

"Oh, blow you, I'm off! I'll go back to Cornwall to-morrow if you start another word."

"That's the stuff!" the big superintendent applauded ironically. "You're not interested in crime or criminals any more! Right-oh! You'll probably read all about the Murdoch in the Wadebridge *Eagle*."

"Will I?" the Irishman replied. "I'm coming here to-morrow to hear the latest about it."

He rose.

"You're not going, are you?" Meldrum asked. "Why, we haven't nearly finished this talk. What about Barshott?"

"What about him?"

"He's been threatened with death."

"Well," the ex-detective said as he took up his hat, "It's up to you policemen to see that the threat isn't carried out. 'Bye!"

Meanwhile Father Austin went back to the presbytery. He was reading his breviary when the telephone bell rang. His servant answered and came in to announce:

"Doctor Marsden wants to speak to you, Father."

"Doctor Marsden?"

"Yes, Father."

The priest went to the telephone which was in the hall.

"I say, Father Austin," he heard when he had announced his readiness to listen, "I wish you would do me a great favour. I'd like to see you over at my surgery in Audrey Street. There's something I'd like to tell you without the possibility of being interrupted. I shall be there till one-thirty."

Father Austin was silent for so long that the doctor evidently thought that the connection had been severed.

"Hello! Hello! Are you there? Are you there, Father Austin?" he called.

"Yes, yes! Sorry; I was distracted for a moment," the priest apologised. "Yes, of course I'll come over. Expect me in half an hour."

"Good!"

A few minutes later Father Austin was walking towards the doctor's surgery. In his disturbed state of mind he walked more quickly than he had intended and he found himself ringing the surgery bell seven minutes before the appointed time.

A male dispenser clad in white answered the door and told him that the doctor would be free in a few minutes. He then showed him into the waiting-room. There Father Austin looked carelessly over some of the superannuated magazines which strewed the table. Suddenly he started. A woman's voice

in the next room was raised, and the tone was anguished.

"You are telling me that," he heard in spite of himself, for the voice, though musical, carried well—"you are telling me that just to deceive me. I won't have him treated in the same way as Ethel."

"Don't be foolish, my dear," a voice which the priest recognized as that of Doctor Marsden replied, "Ethel has an incurable disease. Peter is in quite a different position."

"But you want to treat Peter as you are treating Ethel!" the girl answered, and her voice was becoming shrill and less musical. "You know what your treatment has done for her! I'm not going to allow you to do the same thing to Peter."

The doctor's voice replied again, and to Father Austin it seemed that he was trying to restrain his impatience.

"I tell you," he said, "that I have not the slightest intention of giving him the same treatment. It may seem the same to you, but it is nothing of the kind."

"It is! It is!" the girl insisted, evidently not far from tears. "And if Peter d-dies, I'll—I'll tell everybody that you murdered him."

"Now, now, now!" Marsden's voice answered. "Don't be hysterical, child,"

There was a clink of glass.

"Here, drink this. It will calm you."

"I don't want to be calmed," was the tearful reply, "and I won't drink that. I'm sure all your medicines are poison, Christopher Marsden!"

There was a short laugh from Marsden, then the slamming of a door, followed by the tap-tap of feminine heels in the hall outside. Then the front door banged.

Father Austin went over to the window and saw a young and—in spite of the emotion which to some extent disfigured her—beautiful girl run

down the steps to the pavement. He would have liked to get a better look at her, but the door leading to the doctor's consulting-room opened and Doctor Christopher Marsden came forward.

"Sorry if I've kept you waiting, Father Austin," he said, holding out his right hand. "Won't you come in here."

Father Austin took the right hand and found the man's grip to be firm, frank and friendly. While he muttered something in response to the cordial greeting he was thinking of something else.

"Peter?" he was saying to himself. "Who is Peter? Isn't Barshott's name Peter?"

CHAPTER V

THE DOCTOR'S LETTER

CHRISTOPHER MARSDEN was cordial, as, indeed, he had always been in his relations with Father Austin. There was, however, something like embarrassment in his manner as he fussed around his consulting-room in his endeavour to make the priest comfortable. At last he sat down facing Father Austin.

"I'm sure, Father Austin," the doctor began with a trace of nervousness, "that you are wondering why I have asked you to come along here. I—er—I really should have come to see you, but I wanted to be quite sure that we should not be interrupted. The fact is, I want to consult you."

"Why choose me, Doctor Marsden?" the priest asked. "Why me in preference to, say, another doctor or a minister of your own religion?"

"Another doctor is out of the question," Marsden replied, "and as for ministers of religion," believe me, you are the only one I know either socially or as a patient. I have, if you will allow me to be personal, Father, very great faith in your judgment, as well as a very great admiration and respect for your qualities."

The priest raised his hands deprecatingly.

"Yes, yes," the doctor went on, "I have known you now for many years and a large number of my patients are your parishioners, so I can claim to know something about you both directly and from others, and as I want advice on a difficult matter I

know of nobody more fit to give it to me—if you care to do so—than you ”

In spite of everything, the priest was impressed by the air of sincerity with which the scholarly-looking man in front of him spoke. Father Austin, no mean judge of men, studied the care-lined, clean-shaven face of the doctor and came to the conclusion that behind the surface calmness there was indeed a troubled mind.

“If I can help you in any way, Doctor Marsden,” he said, “I shall be very glad to do so, both as a priest and as a man.”

“Thank you, Father Austin,” Marsden replied. “I thought I should not knock at your door in vain. Now, I will waste no more of your time in mere talk, but will come to the point.”

Father Austin waited.

“It is not so long ago,” the doctor continued, “since you and I met at the deathbed of Jimmy Murdoch, a man we both respected and liked, and who liked us. He was, I know, your friend Father, and a member of your Church, but he was also my friend though we differed on very many questions and even argued violently about them. When he fell ill, he always called me in, and I do not think that I am exaggerating when I say that I believe he had more faith in me as a medical practitioner than in any other doctor he knew.”

“I believe that to be so,” Father Austin said.

“I was, therefore,” the doctor continued, “all the more distressed at my own inability to save his life. His illness began with the usual neglected cold, but, as you know, it did not respond to the usual treatment. I admit to you, Father, that even now I really do not know and do not understand why a man of Murdoch’s fine constitution went under as he did. The development of pneumococcal septicaemia was as unexpected to me as if he had suddenly caught Asiatic cholera.”

Father Austin could not help wondering where all this was leading. Perhaps something of this showed in his expression, for Marsden stopped for a moment.

"I am not telling you this," he went on then, "by way of excuse, but merely as a preliminary to what comes after. I honestly think that I cannot be accused of negligence in Murdoch's case. I was, perhaps, incompetent—not up to my job—and it was the fear that this was so which made me call in Sir George Matchby. He, however, put my mind at ease by what he said. Now, I am worried again."

Marsden stopped and took from his breast-pocket an envelope which he handed over to Father Austin. Read that please," he said. "It came this morning."

Before all Father Austin looked at the typewritten address on the envelope. Then he took out the letter. This was also typewritten.

Dear Doctor Marsden, he read, not long ago your patient James Murdoch died while under treatment by you. There are those—especially among your patients who know your ideas on points very much in the public mind at present—who think that a curious fact in view of the fact that Murdoch was always a healthy man. You are known to have differed from Murdoch violently with regard to certain articles written by him for his paper. The fact is all the more curious as certain other patients of yours are not progressing under your treatment.

Take notice, then, that you are being watched. Competent eyes are following your movements, and should there be any more deaths like that of Murdoch there will be a reckoning, if not with the Law, then with

Lover of Justice.

The priest read this through in silence, then

handed it back also without a word of comment.

"What do you think of it?" Marsden asked.

"With all my experience of human nature," Father Austin replied, "I can never understand the mentality of people who write anonymous letters of this type."

"Nor can I," the doctor answered, "but that's not the point. What should I do about it?"

"If it were my own case," was the priest's reply, "I should ignore it altogether."

"That is my own inclination," Marsden said, "but there are other considerations."

"Yes?"

"Yes, there is this point, for example: as a medical man I am at the mercy of any malicious person who gets his knife into me. You must have heard of many cases where doctors have had to face accusations from their patients—accusations which have been proved false only after great difficulty. Now, the writer of this is undoubtedly malicious, and is sure not to confine himself to writing me an anonymous letter. They never do. I should not be surprised to learn that some of my patients have received similar letters."

"Nor should I," Father Austin replied grimly, "but what of it if you have nothing with which to reproach yourself?"

"Now, Father Austin, I'm sure you have heard the old proverb about mud thrown against a wall. Some of it sticks. Once a venomous suggestion gets round about a doctor, his livelihood—if nothing else—is going to suffer."

The priest was silent. He felt himself to be in a difficult position. He decided to temporise.

"May I have another look at that letter?" he asked.

The doctor handed it over.

"Have you any idea," Father Austin inquired, "what is referred to by this phrase: 'certain

other patients of yours are not progressing under your treatment'?"

"Not the slightest," was the reply. "I dare say that there are literally dozens of my patients who are not progressing as well as they or I should like. I dare say also that among them are many who differ from me strongly on many matters which have nothing to do with my treatment of them as patients. As I see it, the suggestion in this letter is that because we differ in such ways, I am taking advantage of my knowledge of things medical and surgical to kill my patients. I really don't know what I have done to make anybody consider me such a monster. The thing is positively—well, I really cannot talk of it calmly."

Father Austin, while the doctor was speaking, was debating within himself whether he had any right to communicate to the other man his knowledge of the anonymous letter received by Barshott. He decided against so doing, but, still at a loss what to advise, he asked another question.

"You know, I presume," he said, "what is referred to when the letter speaks of your differences with Murdoch?"

"I can guess," was the reply. "Poor Murdoch felt very strongly on the morality or otherwise of allowing doctors or others the right to give a painless death to patients suffering from a painful and incurable disease."

"Just as I feel," the priest thought right to interpolate.

"Exactly. He was a Catholic, and as a Catholic, I realise, he could not think otherwise. I appreciate the fact that the Catholic philosophy of life forbids the idea absolutely."

"But you do not agree with the Catholic philosophy of life, as you call it?" Father Austin queried.

"On this particular matter, no. I do not claim

to be even a Christian, except in so far as I try to follow certain of Christ's teachings, but that is by the way. 'If I were a Christian I should most certainly be a Catholic, but there you are! I am most emphatically in favour of putting incurable sufferers out of their suffering. Oh, I know all the Christian arguments against it. I could also point out some illogicalities in the Christian attitude towards human life, for I am not satisfied with the observance of the Commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill,' which is an absolute one, and which if you pretend to obey it at all should be obeyed without derogation or exception. I really don't see why capital punishment is allowed, for example, and euthanasia forbidden. Then there is this war business!"

Father Austin made no comment, though the abstention was difficult, for he dearly loved a verbal tussle with those of Marsden's views.

"Then," he contented himself with saying, "you feel as strongly about your point of view on this matter as Murdoch did about his?"

"I suppose so. We certainly argued about it often enough in a friendly way. He knew quite well, for example, that I was the author of a letter to the *Epoch* signed 'Medico,' replying to his first article, yet he had no hesitation in calling me in when he fell ill. The suggestion that I would try to do otherwise than save him did not occur to him, I am sure, any more than the thought that he would do me an injury would occur to me. I was sorely tempted, though, when I saw that it was hopeless, to give him an overdose of morphia. God! How he suffered towards the end! I'm pretty well hardened to suffering, Father, but I really suffered myself with poor old Jimmy."

"Then you didn't give him the overdose?" Father Austin asked, absolutely expressionless.

"Good heavens, no!" was the reply, given with

an indignation which surprised the priest. "The duty of a doctor, under the rules which have governed the profession up to the present day, is to *save* life—nothing else. I contend merely that rules should be altered to cover certain eventualities."

"You mean when death appears certain in any case?"

"Yes."

"Then you claim for doctors what you deny, for instance, to the Pope?"

"What's that?"

"Infallibility."

"There are cases," the doctor evaded, "when there can be no possibility of a mistake."

"Do you believe in miracles, Doctor Marsden?" the priest shot out.

"No, not the sort you mean."

"Yet," Father Austin countered slyly, "I seem to remember a patient of yours—Kate Madden by name—whom you pronounced incurable. She went to Lourdes and now she's cleaning out a dozen City offices every morning, as healthy a woman as ever scrubbed a floor."

"That was certainly a curious case," the doctor said thoughtfully.

Father Austin did not rub it in. He changed the subject, for he had suddenly made up his mind on the advice he was going to give.

"Have you any suspicion whatever as to who wrote—or rather typed—that letter?" he asked.

"Not the slightest, but it must be one of my patients, or somebody who knows a good number of them."

"That includes a fairly big crowd, I should think."

"I'm afraid it does. I have over a thousand panel patients, alone, and heaven knows how many private ones."

Father Austin looked at the letter again.

"I'm not an expert," he said, "but it seems to me that this was typed by somebody who has a very old-fashioned sort of machine. I haven't seen this particular sort of type for years."

It seemed to the priest that the doctor started at this, but afterwards he thought that he might have been mistaken.

"Well, now, Doctor Marsden," he said, "I confess I hardly know what to say to you. There are reasons why I cannot say all I should like to say. However, my advice is either to go to Scotland Yard with that letter and invite inquiry not only into the identity of the anonymous letter-writer, but into your own life and conduct. I'm sure they'd be discreet, and if later there was any trouble it would be a big point in your favour."

The doctor made a movement.

"Now, don't misunderstand me," the priest said, holding up his hand, "I am merely guarding against eventualities. Now, if you don't like the course I suggest, then go to a friend of mine of whom I've often spoken to you, ex-Superintendent Gilmartin. He is in Town at the moment and I'll give you a letter of introduction to him with pleasure."

"M'm! Gilmartin! Yes! I heard you speak of him. That might be a good idea!"

The priest rose. Marsden held out his hand.

"Thank you, Father," he said, "for bothering with me. I had really no right to——"

"I'm glad you asked my advice," Father Austin interrupted, "but sorry I could not do or say better than I have."

The priest hesitated.

"I—er—think I ought to tell you," he went on, "that before you mentioned this matter, I had already become aware of a tentative accusation of murder against you."

The doctor started.

"Oh?" was all he said.

"Yes," Father Austin went on, "I'm afraid I couldn't help hearing what was said by the young lady who was in here before me."

Doctor Marsden's face became wooden.

"I am sorry, Father," he said coldly but politely, "but I cannot discuss that."

CHAPTER VI

CONFERENCES

LATER that day Father Austin was glad to see Gilmartin arrive at his modest little presbytery. The ex-superintendent told the priest what had taken place during his interview at Scotland Yard, and Father Austin in his turn thought it necessary to inform his friend of his visit to Doctor Marsden's surgery and of what had taken place there. Gilmartin looked serious, and as was his habit when deep in thought, he pursed his lips in an almost soundless and totally tuneless whistle.

"What do you think of things now?" the priest asked finally.

"I shall require notice of that question," Gilmartin answered.

"I don't think I've ever been so perplexed about anybody in my life," Father Austin said, "as about Doctor Marsden."

"M'm!" the Irishman nodded. "Same sort of thing I've always felt about every potential suspect. Very annoying."

"Annoying? It's worse than annoying. It distresses me to think that one side of my mind is considering a man to be a murderer and another side looks on him as a wronged man."

"I shouldn't worry about that," the ex-superintendent advised, "because in neither case have you sufficient data to work upon. It's not really your mind—at any rate your intellect—that's working; it's your imagination, your instinct, your heart or whatever you like to call it. Do you think that

Marsden will follow your advice and come to see me? ”

“ I really couldn’t say. I’m afraid I rather antagonised him by my final remark about that girl.”

“ Yes, pity you mentioned that—but then you’re a priest—an honest, conscientious man, not a detective! A fellow like me would have held that little bit of knowledge in reserve—in cold storage for future use.”

“ I dare say,” Father Austin replied, “ but I—well, I suppose I did think that it would be more honest to let him know.”

“ Oh, it was—undoubtedly !” Gilmartin said, but somewhat absentmindedly.

Father Austin allowed him to remain silent for some minutes before breaking in on his thoughts. This he finally did by placing in front of him a tankard of beer, drawn from a little cask which had been ordered in as soon as he had heard of his friend’s arrival in London. Gilmartin lifted it automatically to his lips and half drained it at one gulp.

“ I noticed,” he said then, “ that you referred to Marsden’s surgery—not his house. Why? ”

“ Why? ” the priest echoed. “ Because it *was* his surgery—not his house. His house is in Bassingbourne Gardens; he sees patients there too, but by appointment only. At Audrey Street he has regular surgery hours when he sees panel patients and others.”

“ Oh! Then that is just a room that he rents? ”

“ Well, not only a room,” Father Austin replied. “ It is the entire ground floor, I believe. There is a waiting-room, a consulting-room, and a little place where his dispenser works, and also, I believe, a room where the dispenser sleeps.”

“ This dispenser? Is she young and pretty? ” Gilmartin asked.

“ It isn’t a ‘ she ’—it’s a ‘ he,’ ” the priest

answered. "A young chap—a fellow of between twenty-five and thirty. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing, except that I just want to know all I can about Marsden. Do you know anything at all about his private life and family arrangements?"

"No," the priest replied, "I only know that he is married. I've never met his wife, but he has a good house and all that. Doesn't entertain, I believe. You see, he has been my doctor on occasion and I have met him at the houses of some of his patients, but that's all, and our relations, though very friendly, are not intimate. To do the chap justice, I believe him to be a good, kind-hearted fellow. When, for instance, any Catholic patient of his is seriously ill, he always makes a point of letting me know, and yet he has no religious beliefs so far as I have ever been able to discover."

"That's certainly something," was Gilmartin's comment on this information.

"I can't make up my mind about that anonymous letter," Father Austin said after a pause.

"Which one?" the Irishman asked. "There are three of them known to us already and heaven knows how many more besides. Anonymous letters are like wolves; they seldom hunt alone. I suppose, however, you mean the one Marsden got—or says he got?"

The priest nodded.

"Well, I'd like to meet the man before giving any opinion," Gilmartin went on, "but there are one or two interesting points I don't mind talking about. In the first place why was this letter typed and not written in block capitals like the other? Secondly, why were the others in block capitals—not typed?"

"I have asked myself the first question already," the priest said.

“And what’s the answer?”

“The only one I can think of is that the writer was afraid that Marsden would recognise the block capitals.”

“Oh! There’s another,” the ex-detective said, “not quite so simple, perhaps, but then I think we are dealing with a complicated mind in the writer of these things. A possible answer to both questions is this: the letter to Barshott was written in block capitals because the writer knew that a man receiving such a threat might conceivably take it to the police; the police, he would reason, would be able to trace a typewriter more easily than block capitals. The same applies to the letter sent to the Commissioner. Now, the letter to Doctor Marsden was not quite of the same kind. Its writer may quite honestly believe that Marsden really did kill Murdoch. If so, Marsden would not go to the police, and would not have the means at his disposal for tracing a typewriter. I gather from what you have said that it was a slightly longer letter than the others. In that case, it may be that the person who sent it merely found it easier to type it than to write it in block capitals; block capitals are a bit of a nuisance at the best of times. It would also be a shrewd calculation on the writer’s part that if innocent of Murdoch’s death, Marsden would do like many another man would do—just throw the thing into the fire.”

“It’s very involved, all that,” Father Austin declared. “However, there’s another thing that worries me more than the reason for typing or writing; it’s the motive for sending the letters at all.”

"What do you mean, Father?"

"Well, look at it like this: (a) Barshott gets a letter which threatens him with the same death as Murdoch if he writes the same sort of articles as Murdoch; (b) the Commissioner of Police gets a letter written by the same hand, whose contents amount to the same thing, but which implies more definitely that Murdoch was murdered; (c) Marsden's letter threatens *him* with a reckoning if *he kills Barshott* though, to be sure, Barshott is not mentioned by name. Don't you see any inconsistency in these three facts?"

"Not exactly inconsistency," Gilmartin replied, "but it certainly does make one wonder if Marsden's letter were from the same hand as the others."

"That would certainly be a complication," the priest thought.

"Or it might simplify things," Gilmartin completed.

"How?"

"I don't know, but I can imagine the possibility. However, there's a theory for you: suppose Marsden himself wrote the first two letters and typed the third and then posted the typed one to himself for your benefit, having received information from somewhere that Barshott had shown you his."

"If he got that information, he could only have got it from me—and I'm sure he didn't—or from you, whom he doesn't know, or from Deacon, the editor of *Unitas*."

"I don't think Deacon would communicate it," Gilmartin smiled, "even when under the influence of bitter ale."

"What! You know Deacon?"

"Rather! We have exchanged a few beers now and then."

"I see," the priest agreed with a grin, and then returned to the subject; "but even if Marsden did get the information in question, I still don't see what his motive would be. It seems mad to me."

"Perhaps that's precisely what it is. That is why I want to meet Marsden before expressing an opinion. I'd also like to know who that girl was that you heard talking to him."

"So should I," Father Austin replied, "but though I did get a side view of her through the window as she went out, it was such a fleeting glimpse that I am not sure whether I would recognise her again if I met her. I did, however, get the impression that she was a remarkably handsome young woman. I would recognise her voice again though."

"Well, that's something," Gilmartin laughed, "for under modern conditions there doesn't seem to be much difference between one girl's voice and another's, and there's not such a dickens of a lot of handsome girls either."

"M'yes, I'm afraid modern life taken by and large is not altogether conducive to beauty either of mind or body," the priest commented seriously.

"There are many who would differ from you, Father," Gilmartin replied. "However——"

He finished his beer, refused a second helping and rose.

"I must be off," he said. "I'll let you know the result of Superintendent Meldrum's talk with the Assistant Commissioner."

He had scarcely gone when Doctor Marsden

rang up asking for the ex-superintendent's address. This the priest gave, informing the doctor that a letter of introduction would not be necessary, mention of his own name being sufficient.

Gilmartin did not return directly to his hotel but went again to Scotland Yard, where he found Meldrum on the point of leaving his room for his interview with his Chiefs. Rapidly he told the superintendent what he had just heard from Father Austin. Meldrum said nothing beyond a "Thanks, Larry!" and a hurried promise to let him know what was happening. The Irishman then walked slowly down to the Westminster station of the District Railway, whence he was soon transported to Earl's Court.

He had not been long in his room at the hotel before he was called to the telephone. It was the reception clerk announcing the arrival of Doctor Marsden. Gilmartin ordered him to be shown directly up to his room.

The detective, accustomed from long practice to sum up men, found his visitor to have the appearance of a much older man than he had been given to expect from his talks with Father Austin. The doctor was obviously embarrassed and Gilmartin, to whose kindly nature many a criminal brought to book by him had often testified, therefore decided to put him at his ease and help him to begin.

"I have just heard of you from my old friend Father Austin," he said before the other could speak. "I believe you want to consult me about something, but I warn you that I am only a retired policeman and have no official or unofficial connection with detective work at present. I sometimes

meddle with things that do not concern me at the express request of my friends, that's all. So long as that is understood, then I am entirely at your service."

"That is quite understood, Mr. Gilmartin," the doctor replied. I do feel an intruder, but Father Austin told me you——"

"Oh, I know," Gilmartin interrupted with a laugh. "Father Austin thinks I'm a miracle-worker of sorts. I'm not, but I am always willing to help any friend of his—if I conscientiously can. What about a drink? Whisky-and-soda?"

"Thank you, I should be glad of one," Doctor Marsden replied frankly.

Gilmartin ordered the drinks—beer for himself—and when the waiter had finally gone, said:

"Now fire away, Doctor. I'm listening."

"In almost the same words but with a greater wealth of detail and explanation supposedly necessary to a stranger, the doctor told the story of Murdoch's death and the anonymous letter. This letter he handed over to Gilmartin, who read it over—not once but twice, then a third time. At the end of Marsden's story the Irishman looked at him steadily for a moment before speaking.

"Thank you, Doctor," he said then. "All that is very clear. Now, what I have to say is short and to the point. Come back here to-morrow at five in the afternoon. I shall have something to say to you then, I am almost certain. Meanwhile, however, I should like you to run things over in your mind and to consider whether when you do come it would not be better for you to be more frank and detailed."

The doctor was about to speak, but Gilmartin stopped him with his raised hand.

"No, no," he said, "don't say anything now. I mean what I say. I want you to be frank about matters which you have not mentioned at all—possibly because you do not think they matter—private matters, for instance; professional matters as well, perhaps, such as differences with other medical men and so on. Good evening, Doctor. To-morrow at five!"

The doctor went looking dazed.

CHAPTER VII

“ NATURAL CAUSES ”

MEANWHILE the controversy with regard to the utterances of Mr. Justice Preemby went on. The Guild of SS. Luke, Cosmas and Damian, which is the organisation of Catholic doctors, sent a strongly worded protest to the Lord Chancellor. All over the country religious and secular bodies were up in arms at what they considered the abuse of His Majesty's Courts of Justice for the propagation of doctrines which were nothing short of immoral. The *Epoch*, finding that the matter still interested the thinking public, kept the campaign alive even after many of the cheaper newspapers, which had imprudently rushed in with early comments, would have dropped it in the interests of their circulations. Barshott, the new leader-writer, though perhaps not so rhetorical, was no less vigorous in his articles than Murdoch had been, and he found agreement in unexpected places with the concluding words of one of his best leaders.

In any case [he wrote at the end of a closely reasoned column of condemnation of the judge's remarks and opinions], it is the business of judges to administer the law, and not to make the judicial bench a platform for criticising it. When they not merely criticise it, but do so in harangues provocative and shocking to citizens of the State, insult is added to injury.

Ex-Superintendent Gilmartin, on the morning after his interview with Doctor Marsden, read this article with approval.

“I must renew my acquaintance with that young man,” he said to himself, and prepared to telephone to his friend Father Austin to arrange the desired meeting.

Before he had time to reach the instrument, however, a message was brought to him with the information that Mr. Meldrum wished to see him as soon as he could make it convenient. The Irishman at once dropped his idea of telephoning to the priest and went out to visit Scotland Yard.

Meldrum was in his little room with a young detective-inspector whom Gilmartin had known as a probationary detective but a few years before.

“Hello, Larry!” the superintendent greeted his former colleague. “I’m glad you’ve come at this moment; Pierce has brought in some information which might interest you. You know Pierce?”

Gilmartin nodded and smiled at the young inspector.

“Yes,” he replied, “I think I was the first to put Pierce through his paces. Eh, Pierce?”

“Yes, sir,” Pierce replied, “you were my first D.D.I.”*

“Good!” Meldrum applauded. “Then it won’t be any novelty for you now to tell your story in his presence. I told you that Mr. Gilmartin was interested in this case.

The inspector nodded.

“Right! Carry on!” the superintendent ordered.

“On receiving your orders, sir,” Pierce began, addressing his superior officer, “I immediately set inquiries on foot to find out as much as possible about Doctor Marsden. These enquiries are not yet completed, but there are one or two things which I thought you ought to know at once. In the first place, sir, Doctor Marsden is liked very much by the poorer classes in his district.”

* Divisional Detective Inspector.

"That's a good sign as a rule," Meldrum commented, and nodded to his subordinate to continue.

"On the other hand," Pierce continued, "Doctor Marsden is known to have expressed his opinion very freely to several people, including relatives of his patients, that in the case of incurable disease a patient should be put out of his misery by means of a painless death."

"We know that much already," Meldrum said.

"I know, sir," Pierce replied. "I only mention it because of what follows."

"I see. Well, go on."

"Doctor Marsden," the inspector went on, "is married—has been married for ten years, during eight of which his wife has been an invalid unable to get out of doors. I have not been able yet to find out what is the name of her ailment, but according to servants' talk in the neighbourhood it is something absolutely incurable. It seems that several specialists have seen her but that none of them have been able to do anything for her, and it would appear that all are agreed that there is really nothing that *can* be done for her."

Gilmartin and Meldrum looked at each other, but in that look, besides the significance it was meant to bear, there was pity at the thought of the tragic situation thus baldly described. The Irishman coughed.

"Did you, by any chance," he asked, "find out Mrs. Marsden's Christian name?"

"Yes, sir," the inspector replied, and consulted his note-book; "it is Ethel Margaret."

"H'm!"

Again the two older men exchanged a look. The inspector went on:

"From Sergeant Bailey, whose wife is a patient of Marsden's, I learned another fact. Doctor Marsden has been seen very often of late in the company of a young lady named Joan Cresswell,

who is related in some way to Mrs. Marsden. She visits the doctor quite often at his home, but oftener still at his surgery in Audrey Street, and gossip says that they are on very affectionate terms. The young woman, it seems, has not been so gay as usual lately, and, in fact, seems worried about something. She lives in Brinsley Street, where she shares a flat with another girl, a medical student called Farquhar, and the charwoman who cleans up for them says that latterly Miss Cresswell has arrived home several times from visits to Marsden with traces of tears on her face.”

Pierce stopped for a moment.

“I have, of course, only given you an outline, sir,” he then said to Meldrum; “the details will be in my written report.”

“M’yes,” Meldrum said, and then again: “M’yes! Is that all?”

“For the present, sir,” Pierce replied. “I hope to get more in a day or so.”

“Well, if I may make a remark, I will,” Gilmartin interposed.

Meldrum grinned.

“I dare say you will,” he said, “whether you may or not. Carry on, Larry.”

“It is merely this,” the ex-detective said, “that all that Pierce has told us is no doubt very interesting and it may be even very significant, but on the other hand it may mean absolutely nothing.”

“Oh, it can’t mean absolutely nothing,” Meldrum protested. “That it *proves* nothing I grant you, but I think that the three—or rather four—facts that Pierce has dug out, taken together with what we already know, are very significant indeed.”

“Expound!” Gilmartin said with a smile.

“What need is there to expound?” the superintendent answered. “Here you have a doctor whose views on what is, after all, a form of homicide punishable by law, are known to be contrary to

the views of that law and of his profession; his wife is an invalid, incurable; he is on friendly, even affectionate terms with a younger woman; the young woman is worried about something of late. Take these facts and put them alongside what your friend the priest heard, and you get a picture which does not look pretty to me."

"Oh, you get a picture 'all right,'" Gilmartin admitted, "but it is an unfinished one. There's a lot of stuff missing from it—both foreground and background—and a picture like that never looks very pretty. Besides, what has all this to do with the question whether James Murdoch died a natural death or not?"

"Nothing directly," Meldrum replied, "but don't forget the anonymous letters."

"I'm not forgetting them," the Irishman said, "I'm remembering them all the time. That's the trouble!"

"I don't quite see that," the superintendent answered.

"Think it over," was all that Gilmartin would say to this.

Inspector Pierce rose.

"I'd better be getting along," he said. "I see that I shall have a lot of work to do."

When he had gone Gilmartin turned to Meldrum.

"You didn't ask me to come here to listen to Pierce's report," he said. "I presume you've something else to tell."

"Yes," the superintendent replied, "I have. The Assistant Commissioner took a serious view of things when I talked to him, and the result is

that Murdoch's body was exhumed during the night.”

“Yes? And——”

“And nothing, yet. Symmons is working on it and we expect his report some time in the course of the day.”

“And then?”

“And then if anything wrong is found we'll haul Doctor Christopher Marsden on a charge of murder.”

“Dangerous, 'Drum, very dangerous!” Gil-martin commented.

“Why?”

“Why? Because you haven't enough evidence against him to hang a cat,”

“Oh, as soon as he is arrested we'll get more,” Meldrum retorted confidently. “It's always like that.”

“I shouldn't bank on it,” Gilmartin counselled.

“Well, I like that!” the superintendent exclaimed. “It was you who came along here and raised the whole hullabaloo and now, after practically accusing the man of murder, you're talking as if you were counsel for the defence.”

“You know jolly well,” the Irishman replied, “that I have not accused anybody of murder—neither Marsden nor anybody else. It was you who jumped to the conclusion that *if* Murdoch was murdered, Marsden was the murderer.”

“So he was!”

“Rot! You have no evidence for that whatever.”

“What about the anonymous letters?”

"*What* about them?" Gilmartin retorted. "Don't you see *that* beyond arousing our interest they do nothing. The two in block capitals merely threaten a man with death in certain eventualities, and——"

"More than that!" Meldrum interrupted. "They threaten him with the same death as that already inflicted on another man."

"Who wrote them?" Gilmartin asked. "The murderer? If not, then somebody who knew that Marsden is a murderer? Why? Don't you see, for instance, that one of the many interpretations of those letters can bear is this: Some fanatical believer in euthanasia knows that Murdoch died, and takes it as a judgment of Providence or whatever God he believes in, or the Devil or what not! Who knows a fanatic's mind, anyhow? He is convinced that a similar fate will overtake Murdoch's successor, and sends out a warning—not a threat!"

"That's fantastic!"

"Of course it is! The whole thing is fantastic! You are obviously dealing with a fantastical character, though, mind you, I don't think it a bit more fantastic than, say, foretelling the fate of the British Empire from the Measurements of pyramids built when England was inhabited by your savage ancestors."

Meldrum laughed.

"Well, I'll grant that at any rate," he said, "but what about the third letter—the one to Marsden himself?"

"I must say that it stumps me," Gilmartin admitted; "it doesn't fit in somehow."

“I’ve got the idea in my head,” the superintendent declared, “that it is only a bluff—perhaps written by Marsden himself.”

“Look here, ‘Drum!’” Gilmartin said. “You have evidently built up a theory and you are looking for facts to fit it. We’ve always warned the younger generation to avoid that, but no matter. Just between ourselves, what is your theory?”

“I haven’t built up a theory,” Meldrum contradicted indignantly, “but being a man, not a sheep, I can’t help forming ideas about things.”

“Oh, call them ideas or what you like,” Gilmartin laughed, “only let’s hear them.”

“My idea is,” the superintendent replied firmly, “that Marsden is a fanatic on one point—euthanasia! Otherwise he is quite a decent fellow. Being a decent fellow he probably warned Murdoch in a veiled way about his campaign. The warning was ignored or not taken seriously, and Marsden killed Murdoch. Barshott, also a patient of Marsden—by the way, funny, isn’t it, that all these people are Marsden’s patients!”

“Not a bit!” Gilmartin contradicted. “Marsden has dozens of journalists among his patients. One recommends him to another—an indication, incidentally, of what they think of him, whatever his views on euthanasia or any other ‘asia’.”

“Yes, yes, but they may be mistaken about him. However, to continue: Marsden feeling as he does about euthanasia and at bottom unwilling to kill unless it is necessary—from his point of view—also warns Barshott, and you can take it from me that ———”

Meldum never finished that particular phrase, for

the 'phone bell rang and interrupted it. The superintendent listened in silence punctuated by grunts indicative of the fact that he heard and understood. Then he laid down the receiver. He seemed to be disappointed.

"No use continuing all this," he said, "it's a waste of time. They have conducted the autopsy on Murdoch and there is nothing to show that his death was due to other than natural causes."

CHAPTER VIII

DOCTOR MARSDEN'S PRIVATE LIFE

GILMARTIN wondered whether Marsden would come back to see him that afternoon, for he was conscious of having been somewhat brusque in his dismissal of the doctor the day before. Promptly, however, at five o'clock Marsden came. He seemed more at ease and more confident of himself than on the previous day.

"I have been thinking things over since yesterday," he said at once, "and I have come to the conclusion, Mr. Gilmartin, that I have been making a mountain out of a molehill."

"'Mwell," the Irishman replied, "I don't know that it was exactly a molehill, but whatever it was, I don't think you need worry any more—at least until you get another anonymous letter of the same type from the same source. If you do, my advice is to put the whole thing in the hands of Scotland Yard."

"I don't like that idea at all," the doctor answered. "I don't know why, but I don't. It seems so silly for a grown man to run off to the police because he has received an anonymous letter, just like a small boy running off to its nurse."

"Yet," Gilmartin reminded him with a smile, "you ran to Father Austin and then to me."

"Ah, that's different," Marsden retorted. "I wasn't running to my nurse then; I was consulting another boy with more experience than I about what I should do."

"Well," Gilmartin replied, "I've given you my

advice. Take it or leave it, Doctor, but remember that it may be too late when the anonymous letter-writer begins to blackmail you."

Doctor Marsden straightened up in his chair.

"Blackmail?" he exclaimed. "Blackmail has absolutely no terrors for me. I will know how to deal with that without any help, I assure you. I fear far more a campaign of insidious lies discreetly bandied about among my patients and friends. There is no way of dealing with that——"

"Except one," Gilmartin interrupted, "and that is to set the police to find the instigator of such a campaign before it goes too far to be stopped. However, I sincerely hope, Doctor, that the occasion may not arise. It is, nevertheless, well to be prepared for it, for you may not be able to dispose of other accusations so easily as of this particular one."

"You mean about having deliberately killed Murdoch?"

"Yes."

"The accusation is, of course, ridiculous, but I don't think we can say that it is disposed of. I intend from now on simply to ignore it."

"Has it not occurred to you," Gilmartin asked, "that if you received an anonymous letter, other people may also have received them?"

"I hadn't thought of it much," the doctor replied, "but I dare say that other people did get them."

"Some people certainly did," Gilmartin told him.

"You mean that you actually know they did?"

"Yes."

"How do you know?"

"I am not at liberty to tell you that," the Irishman replied, "but I may tell you that they were sufficiently convincing to make the police ask a few questions here and there."

"Which were, I gather, answered satisfactorily," Marsden completed.

Gilmartin avoided answering this.

"One question was certainly disposed of satisfactorily enough for the time being," he replied.

"Which one was that?"

"Whether Murdoch's death was due to natural causes or not."

Marsden looked horrified.

"You mean," he stammered, "you mean that exhumed the body and examined it?"

"Yes."

"Good heavens," Marsden exclaimed. "And I wasn't told?"

"There was no reason why you should," Gilmartin told him grimly. "If anything had been found wrong you'd have been told soon enough."

The doctor stood up. He was looking older than when he came in.

"Why have you told me this?" he asked. "I would much rather have known nothing about it. Now I shall be worrying that every patient who dies on my hands will be exhumed."

"I shouldn't do that," the Irishman told him, "because even if it were done what have you to fear from it?"

"Oh, nothing, of course, but it is not an agreeable thought, you must agree. However, thank you very much, Mr. Gilmartin. It was very good of you to take any interest whatever in my troubles."

Marsden seemed embarrassed. He appeared to be ready to leave the room, but seemed to be held back by something. Finally he coughed.

"I have been thinking over what you said yesterday," he said, "but I really cannot understand what you meant."

"To what particular words of mine are you referring?" Gilmartin asked.

"You advised me to be more frank about my private affairs," Marsden replied, "but for the life of me I cannot understand why you should have spoken like that. Indeed, it often seems to me that I *have* no private life, but in any case I really don't know what my private life has to do with the matter."

"Don't worry about that any more," Gilmartin counselled; "the whole affair is, I hope, over and done with—dead and buried."

When the doctor finally left, Gilmartin went over and opened the communicating door between his room and the room adjoining. A big elderly man who looked like a successful farmer was there. He grinned at the Irishman.

"That'll be all right, Chief," he said in a deep rumbling voice; "I'll know him again, but will you be requiring me now that the matter is closed?"

"Yes, Peters, I shall still require you," Gilmartin replied, "because though when I sent for you yesterday I didn't know all I know now, I still want you to make the inquiries, for I'm not satisfied about this business yet. There's something funny going on somewhere and I'd like to know what it is."

"Well, you know, sir," ex-Inspector Peters said earnestly, "that you've only got to say the word and I'm always ready to go back to the old work. I get very tired of this civilian life, doin' nothin' all the time, since I went out on pension. If I had a house and garden in the country, now, that'd be different, but the wife won't live out of London except when she goes to visit her mother at Peterborough."

"Well, Peters," Gilmartin said with a smile, "I'm glad to see that you still hanker after the old

work, for I know nobody who can do the sort of stuff I want done as well as you. Besides, I can't ask the Yard to make inquiries just for my own satisfaction."

"Thank you, Chief," Peters replied. "Then you want me to find out all I can about this doctor's private life, and you want to know about this Miss Joan Cresswell."

"Yes."

"Good! I'll set about it," the ex-inspector said, "but there's one thing I'd like to ask you, Chief."

"Right! Carry on!"

"Why did you tell that doctor about that body bein' exhumed?"

"As a warning, Peters," Gilmartin replied. "If he is as innocent as he appears to be, then there's no harm done. If he is not innocent, and if he is contemplating any more of those euthanasia stunts, he may change his mind about them now that he knows of the exhumation of Murdoch's body."

"Ah!" Peters declared. "But he might just be more careful, that's all."

"We'll have to risk that," his former chief answered.

"The whole thing beats me, Chief," Peters said. "These 'ere 'nonymous letters is the thing to tackle, to my mind. Who wrote them is what I'd like to know."

"So should I, Peters," Gilmartin replied, "and that's why I'm putting you on the job."

"You're putting me on to investigating the doctor himself," Peters declared, "not the letters."

"Well, what's wrong with that? The doctor is the only point common to all the letters. He may even have written them himself. If he didn't, then they were written by somebody who knows him and his affairs very well. Part of what you

will have to find out is whether there is any person near him who dislikes him and would like to get him into trouble. How you will set about all this, Peters, I leave entirely to you. You're an old hand at the game and don't need to have every movement mapped out for you in advance."

"As long as you don't hustle me," Peters told him, "I'll dig out all there is to be known about him and that girl."

"Oh, I don't think there is any great need for hurry," Gilmartin said, "but don't be any longer than you can help. You'd better keep on this room for the time being. It might be convenient to let as few people as possible know that we are in any way connected. Let me know when you want any money."

Curiously enough it was Gilmartin himself who was the first to discover something of Marsden's activities outside his practice. The Irishman had just crossed Piccadilly Circus on his way to the Regency Palace Hotel for tea, for after the quiet of the country he liked the busy din of that caravan-serai, when he saw Marsden drive up in a taxi to the door of the hotel. The doctor did not see Gilmartin, for the latter effaced himself behind a stationary newsvendor while Marsden paid his driver and walked in through the glass doors. Gilmartin followed him at a discreet distance and saw a girl rise from a seat in the reception lounge and come quickly towards the doctor. They did not shake hands, but the girl caught hold of the man by the arm and almost dragged him into the tea-lounge to a table in a secluded corner upon which stood a "reserved" card.

The Irishman made a grimace. There was not the slightest hope of finding a seat anywhere near them whence he could hear what passed between them. He chose a table a little to one side where

Marsden could not see him without turning round in his seat. He himself had a partial view of the doctor and a full view of the girl. The latter was talking—had indeed been talking ever since she had met Marsden. He was frowning and pulling his upper lip. From their expressions Gilmartin could deduce nothing, except that the girl, for all her vivacity, appeared worried and anxious.

Gilmartin sipped the tea which a waitress brought him, fully expecting to have a long vigil. He was determined to find out whether the girl was the Joan Cresswell of whom he had already heard. He amused himself by jotting down on an envelope a description of her on the lines of a police verbal photograph. He was really amused when he read what he had written:

Height—about 5 ft. 6 ins.

Build—slim

Head—small

Hair—fair, semi-shingled

Eyebrows—dark, thin, curved.

Forehead—straight, medium.

Eyes—hazel.

Nose—regular, medium

Mouth—small

Lips—medium, very slightly protruding

Teeth—regular, small

Fingers—long, tapering

Chin—round, firm

Ears—not visible

Complexion—fair, clear (her own)

Dress—smart brown fur coat over green three-piece costume

“What a description!” he said to himself. “It’s exact, but who would think from it that she was a damn’ pretty girl—no, by Jove! She’s a very beautiful girl.”

Hurriedly he snatched the large menu-card from

its clip on the table and began to peer at it as if he were very shortsighted. The couple he was watching had begun to move, and to reach the door they must pass his table. A moment later they were brushing past, taking no notice of the myopic individual with his nose in the menu-card. The girl was talking:

"I am really worried, Chris," she was saying, "about Peter's cold. You know how this 'flu germ is everywhere now."

"Don't worry, Joan, my dear," Marsden replied; "we'll soon put it all right. It's not so serious as it might have been."

That night as he was going to bed Gil-martin received a telephone message from Father Austin.

"Barshott," the priest said, "has caught a bad cold and has called in Marsden."

CHAPTER IX

PETERS GETS "IMPRESSIONS"

WITH no official standing there was nothing Gilmartin could do to safeguard the interests—perhaps the life of Barshott. He did not feel, indeed, that he was called upon to do anything out of the ordinary. He had not even renewed his former acquaintanceship with the journalist, and his interest in the matter of the anonymous letters was, after all, due only to his friendship with Father Austin. On receiving the priest's telephone message he had promised to pass on the information to Superintendent Meldrum. This he did on the following morning, but found the Scotland Yard man inclined to pooh-pooh the whole thing. Reminded of the fact that the author of the anonymous letters was as yet unknown, the superintendent had said: :

"My dear Larry, I suppose there are thousands of anonymous letters written in London every year and no harm done! Why worry about these particularly? We've found that as far as Murdoch was concerned they were wrong, so that ends the matter."

Gilmartin had to admit to himself that had he been in the place of his ex-colleague he would have adopted the same attitude as he and been quite at ease in his mind.

In any case, he reasoned to himself, even supposing against the weight of the evidence that Murdoch had been killed by Marsden, it was hardly

conceivable that a man of the doctor's intelligence, after the scarcely veiled warning he had received, would attempt to repeat his crime in the case of Barshott. Even allowing for a fanatical sponsoring of the idea of "euthanasia" on Marsden's part, Gilmartin found it difficult to believe that the doctor was of the type to imagine that he had scotched the opposition to his pet idea by the mere fact that he had removed one or two of its more prominent opponents. The ex-superintendent—no incompetent judge of his fellow men—found, indeed, no grounds for the belief that Marsden was a fanatic. It was hardly characteristic of a fanatical exponent of the doctrine of the legalised killing of incurables to refrain from killing thus his own wife, especially if his affections had been transferred elsewhere. Nor would a fanatic await the legalisation of the practice. In his position as medical attendant of the sufferers, the opportunities of putting his ideas into practice without fear of detection were many, provided he said nothing to incriminate himself. Furthermore, a fanatic would without doubt throw the ethics of the medical profession to the winds if he felt so strongly opposed to them. Marsden, on the other hand, appeared to be a stickler for medical etiquette and ethics—unless, of course, that was only a pose and a blind! Madmen with an *idée fixe* have all the cleverness of the drug-fiend in matters concerning the furtherance of their pet schemes.

Thus went Gilmartin's thoughts. As he completed each argument in his mind he found himself in every case confronted with the authoritative verdict that James Murdoch had died a natural

death, and laughed at himself for allowing the question to obsess him to that point. Why it troubled him so much he could hardly explain except by the feeling that something was wrong somewhere. What that something was he wondered whether it was his duty to find out. Experience of previous "hunches" had taught him to respect them, but then he had been a member of that body of men to whom is deputed by the citizens of the country the right and the duty to suppress evil and apprehend the evil-doers. It was partly the thought that he no longer belonged to that body which led him to shirk—even to deny—all responsibility in the matter now occupying his mind.

While his thoughts were thus employed he heard a movement in the adjoining room which had been booked for ex-Inspector Peters. The movement was soon followed by a knock at the communicating door, and Peters himself entered.

"I've been nosing around," the bucolic ex-inspector announced, "but so far I haven't found much in the way of hard facts."

"Which means," Gilmartin said, "that you probably have collected a goodly number of impressions; I don't think that you are the sort of lad who indulges in fancies."

Peters grinned widely.

"No," he replied, "fancies isn't much in my line, Chief. I don't even back 'orses."

"Well, what about your impressions," then? "

"I dunno what you call impressions," Peters declared, "but yesterday evening and this morning I've been loafin' round the district where this

doctor chap lives an' 'as 'is practice. He attends a lot ' poor people round there, an' do you know, sir, there isn't one o' them I spoke to as 'as a bad word to say about 'im. In fact, sir, it's my opinion there'd be a riot if Marsden was arrested even for murder."

" Well, though that is very good hearing in its way, Peters," Gilmartin commented, " it doesn't prove much either way."

" I told you I 'adn't much in the way o' facts," the ex-inspector reminded his former chief, " but I will make bold to say, sir, that when you get the poor people talking like that about a man—especially a doctor—there's not much wrong with the man. Besides, sir, it's not only them. I 'ad a talk with a nurse as does the night-nursing o' Mrs. Marsden. She says 'e's as gentle as can be with his wife. When I said as it was rumoured the doctor 'ad took up with another woman I thought she'd jump down my throat."

" I'll bet you didn't wait long enough to let her do that," Gilmartin laughed.

" No, it was the nurse as left me," Peters replied, " but that didn't matter. I thought it'd be a good thing to collect the opinions of people who see Doctor Marsden often, and so I hung round the surgery in Audrey Street till I met the dispenser chap that lives there and makes up the medicine for the poorer patients. He's a fellow called Carpenter—a poor sort o' fish he is, but he's so fond o' Marsden that I could hardly bring myself to say a word against the doctor. It wasn't needed, for that chap would have talked for a week about what a clever doctor his boss was, and what a great

man he was in every way. It seems Marsden picked this chap up when he was starving and out of a job, and made this dispensing job for him. There's one thing, though—the only real fact I got hold of—Marsden uses that surgery not only as a consulting-room where he receives patients, but also as a sort of a lab—lab'rat'ry, and he often goes there of an evening to study and make experiments. I asked this Carpenter chap what sort of experiments, but he just looked at me as if I was dirt and said: 'A roughneck like you wouldn't understand even if I told you.' I said perhaps I wouldn't, an' he said: 'I'm damn' sure you wouldn't, because I don't understand them all, and I'm a qualified man and served my time as a chemist.' As a matter of fact, sir, I had a hard job to get away from the fellow. He seems a lonely bloke and likes to talk, and all he can talk about is his wonderful boss."

"Why didn't you try the same stunt as you did with the nurse?" Gilmartin asked with a smile.

"I did," Peters replied; "I sort o' laughed when he told me about the doctor's experiments, and I said something about the surgery being a good place for visitors after dark—women visitors especially; but the chap didn't rise to it. He just sort o' looked at me as if he pitied me and said I knew nothin' about it. 'An' what about it,' he said, 'if a lady does come to see him? Doesn't women ever 'ave ailments?' Oh, he was very sarky, 'e was, an' I 'ad to pass it off as a joke, an' I said somethin' about women 'avin' more ailments than men. He doesn't like women by the way he

took that. 'I don't care,' 'e says, 'if they 'ad every disease in the world.' "

"He's evidently a very loyal employee at any rate," Gilmartin commented.

"Oh, he's all that," the ex-inspector declared, "though he is a miserable little squirt. I'd make three of him an' have a fair-sized man left over."

The Irishman laughed as he looked at the big farmer-like ex-inspector who evidently judged people by their size in relation to himself.

"I see," Gilmartin said; "so on the whole you found unanimous opinion as to Doctor Marsden's good qualities?"

"Not entirely unanimous," Peters replied, "I 'ad a funny meeting in one o' the poor streets. There was a two-seater car in front of a house an' I asked whose it was. The fellow I asked wasn't a talkative sort o' chap an' 'e just said: 'The doctor. Woman sick in there.' I waited around thinking it might be Marsden, but it wasn't. A queer-looking customer came out of the house carrying a bag. He was a little chap about forty-five with an ugly face and a head about three sizes too big for him. Before he could start his car I walked up to him and said: 'Excuse me, sir, are you Doctor Marsden?' He looked up at me like one o' them terrier dogs an' then gave a bark at me. 'No,' says 'e, 'I'm not! I'm Doctor Warbrick. Do you want a doctor?' 'Sorry, sir,' I said, 'I was looking for Doctor Marsden. I was told to get on his panel.' 'Huh!' says this Warbrick. 'I dunno why you fellows all want to get on his panel!' I said I didn't care whose panel I was on, 'cause I was never sick, an' 'e looked

at me as if 'e believed me, and laughed a nasty sort of a laugh. 'Heh!' says 'e. 'Then you'll be no good to Marsden. He won't be able to try any of his fancy stuff on you.' I says a bottle o' cough-mixture about once a year is about my measure, an' Warbrick laughed again. 'Well,' 'e says, 'you won't get it from Marsden; you'll get some anti-something-or-other serum.' I looked as if I didn't know what he was talking about, and to tell you the truth, sir, no more I didn't. However, I asked him to give me his address and he gave it to me. I must manage somehow to get on his panel. It won't be an easy job, because I'm not on the health insurance, but—"

"Did you find out anything else about this Warbrick?" Gilmartin interrupted.

"Not much," Peters replied; "but there was a woman standin' at her door on the other side of the street lookin' at us, so when Warbrick's car had gone I went over to her and asked her what sort of a doctor that was. I said he'd nearly bitten my head off when I asked to get on his panel. She evidently didn't like Warbric, because she said to me to do nothing o' the sort, but to go an' get on Doctor Marsden's panel. I drew 'er out. It wasn't a hard job. It seems that this Warbrick is very unpopular with the older residents of the district, and only newcomers go to him or call him in. He is a newcomer himself. This woman told me that he was the sort that wants to see the colour of your money before he will go near you or treat your ailments. He's rough, she said, an' has a sharp tongue, and, she said, takes a drop more than is good for him now and then. When he's a bit

squiffy he begins to talk sneeringly about Marsden's methods. Now, of course, all this is gossip—the worst and most unreliable sort of gossip at that, and I am repeating it just as I heard it. This good woman went so far as to say that when in a very nasty mood Warbrick actually accuses Marsden of poisoning his patients in order to satisfy himself about the results of some new-fangled experiment.”

CHAPTER X

A VISIT TO THE SICK

FATHER AUSTIN'S parochial work did not leave him a great deal of time which he could really call his own. The Catholic priest in a London parish of the type to which he ministered is in a very different position from that occupied by the incumbent of a rectory in a fashionable district, for whereas the heaviest, and perhaps even the least enjoyable, part of the latter's work is often the fulfilment of social obligations, the pastor of a poor parish has very little time for such. The Catholic poor demand—probably rightly—more from their priests than do the rich, Catholic or otherwise, and what they demand they get—and more.

Much, therefore, as Father Austin might have desired to spend a certain amount of time with his friend ex-Superintendent Gilmartin, he found it impossible. The influenza epidemic of that year was of a type which, though perhaps not more severe than in former winters, left its victims in a condition of such mental and physical depression that they were with difficulty persuaded even to imagine that such things as comfort and good cheer existed any longer, and it became the priest's duty not only to visit the sick who called for his services, but also to seek out those who did not, and bring to them first of all whatever he had in the shape of a buoyant disposition in order to drag them willy-nilly from their despondency, which was too passive and indifferent a state to be dignified by the name of despair.

Such a case was that of an old woman who, though rejoicing in the name of Maggie O'Riordan, was a Cockney of Cockneys, a flower-seller whose witty tongue and cheerful smile were known to all who frequented the West End. Father Austin, who had heard by chance of her absence from her pitch in Oxford Street, sought her out and found her ill with the prevailing complaint, and so indifferent to all that was going on around her that it was with difficulty that he could get from her more than monosyllabic replies. The longest phrase she uttered during his first visit indicated her attitude:

"D'jew know, Farver, I don't care if it snows mud! Wot's it matter, any'ow?"

The priest, however, knew the danger of such indifference and repeated his visits daily, though with little success as far as cheering the old woman up was concerned. She would mumble a few prayers with him and finger her rosary in an absent-minded fashion, then stop and mutter:

"Gawd forgimme, it don't seem as if them prayers *was* prayers some'ow!"

"I know the feeling, Maggie," Father Austin told her; "I've often felt like that. We all do now and then."

This seemed to console her, but it failed to arouse any of the cheerful side of her nature.

Father Austin was therefore surprised one day on approaching the door of her spotless little tenement room to hear cheerful voices from within and to discover that one of them—cracked and somewhat weak—was actually Maggie's. He knocked at the door and answered the invitation to come in. His first sight was that of the old lady sitting up in bed wearing the old familiar smile.

"Good mornin', Farver," she hailed him. "Come in. I'm gettin' on just bee-yowtiful nah!"

See wot it is when your sperrits is good. And that's all thanks to Miss Cresswell there. Miss Cresswell, this is Farver Orsting!"

The priest turned and saw at the tiny sink, dressed in an overall, the girl whom he had heard talking with Doctor Marsden. He could not help a momentary start. He smiled, however, and received in return a smile from the girl.

"Well," he said, "I am glad somebody has been able to cheer Maggie up; I've tried for days and haven't been able to get the tiniest smile from her."

"Oh, the girl replied, "that's Maggie's contrariness, but she and I are such old friends that she daren't do that with me. Besides, we always find something jolly to talk about, don't we, Maggie?"

"That we do, Miss," the old woman laughed. "You was allus one to make me laugh, you was, ever since you was a little nipper no 'igher'n me knee, an' used to buy flahrs from me when I was in the Circus."

She looked at the priest with a twinkle in her old eyes.

"She's a cure, she is, Farver," she went on. "when she starts imitytin' all them toffs as wants a button'ole; it's a fair scream, it is."

Joan Cresswell blushed.

"Now, Maggie," she laughed, "you shouldn't give me away like that. What will Father Austin think of the company you keep."

The old lady threw a roguish glance accompanied by an exaggerated wink in the priest's direction.

"An' wot d'jew care wot 'e thinks, duckie," she asked, "you bein' one o' them Prodesans as goes to a posh church?"

"Now, now, Maggie!" Father Austin admonished with upraised finger. "What about 'one o'

them Catholics as doesn't go to no church ' sometimes? "

" Ah! That's 'intin', that is," Maggie replied, unabashed. " You know it's me roomatticks! Don't you mind him, Miss Cresswell; Farver Orsting's a bit of a one hisself. 'E can do a bit of imitytin' on 'is own, 'e can. Y'ought to go an' 'ear one of his sermons! Oo! 'E don't 'arf let us 'ave it, he don't! "

The girl during this was taking off her overall and folding it.

" Y'ain't goin', are you, miss? " Maggie asked. " Farver's all right when you know 'im."

" I'm sure he is," Joan laughed, " but I really must go. Now that I'm leaving you in such good hands I can go and see some of the other sick people I have on my hands."

The girl's face was serious now, and Maggie's expression grew sympathetic.

" Isn't it just like me," the old woman said, " to think I was the only one? Well, good-bye, dearie. See yer ter-morrer, p'raps."

" Good-bye, Maggie. I shall certainly come in to-morrow to see that you don't get into mischief."

Joan Cresswell turned to the priest and held out her hand.

" I am very glad to have met you, Father," she said. " I have heard a lot about you from Doctor Marsden. He is one of your greatest admirers."

When she had left the room Maggie turned serious.

" You wouldn't fink, Farver," she said, " as she 'as 'er own troubles? "

" We all have our troubles, Maggie," Father Austin replied, sitting down by the bed. " I must say, though, that that young lady seems to be quite bright and cheerful."

" That's only to cheer me up, Farver," the old

woman declared, "but she 'as 'er fill o' worritin' too, poor girl, an' 'ere's me moanin' 'as if I was dyin'—an' nobody dependin' on me neether."

"What's her trouble, Maggie? Perhaps you and I could help in some way."

"Well, strickly between ourselves, Farver," Maggie told him, "I don't fink we can do much. You see, it's 'er boy as she's fond of 'as been took wiv some sickness or accident, I dunno which, an' she's worritin' abaht it."

"Isn't he under medical treatment?" Father Austin asked. "What is wrong with him?"

"What's wrong wiv 'im, Farver," Maggie replied, "I couldn't tell yer—not knowin' an' not likin' to arst, but by the look o' things, Miss Cresswell finks it's somefin' serious. Doctor Marsden's 'tendin' to 'im, but 'e don't seem to be able to cure 'im—an' if 'e carn't, there ain't a doctor in England as can."

"What's his name, do you know?" the priest asked.

"I don't know, Farver, exceptin' 'is first nyme. 'My Peter' she calls 'im; that's all I know, an' I don't like to be too nosy."

"What does she do, this Miss Cresswell? Does she work for a living?"

"Work of a livin'? Not 'er! She don't need to. 'Er farver left 'er enough to buy the Bank of England. A big contractor, 'e was. I knowed a man as worked for 'im once—makin' them new Artesian roads."

The priest smiled.

"Yes, there's plenty of money in that," he said.

"Well 'e myde plenty, any'ow," Maggie declared, "an' Miss Joan 'as it now, 'er bein' an only child an' an orphan."

"I hope she spends it wisely," was the priest's pious wish uttered not without guile.

Maggie was up in arms at the idea that her favourite was being blamed, even by implication.

"'Er?" she exclaimed. "She ain't one o' yer flighty cocktail-drinkin' 'ussies as goes rahnd the 'otels up West. She's a nice girl, she is. Spend 'er money wisely? Imph! If all the rich people 'elped the pore the way she does, there wouldn't be no need of doles, nor old-age pensions neether!"

This was very satisfactory, but the priest wanted some more information.

"She mentioned Doctor Marsden," he said. "Does she know him well?"

"'Course she does," Maggie replied, "seein' as she's a first cousin of 'is wife's—poor thing!"

"Who?" Father Austin asked innocently—"Miss Cresswell?"

"No! Mrs. Marsden, o' course. A sick woman, she is. I nowed 'er when she and Miss Joan used to walk out in the Park together—not but what she's a deal older'n Miss Joan, an' she was gay an' 'appy in them days. She's one o' them women as marryin' didn't agree wiv, I says."

"How can you say that, Maggie?"

"Well, Farver, wot else can I sye? She was young an' 'ealfy an' gay afore she married Doctor Marsden, an' ever since she's been a sick woman—incurable too, they sye."

"Very sad indeed!" Father Austin said.

"Ah! Well may you sye it, Farver," the old flower-seller sighed. "An' pore Doctor Marsden! 'Im as was such a well-set-up young feller! You'd think 'e was sixty to look at 'im nah!"

"Oh, he's not very young," Father Austin said.

"I wish I was as young," Maggie declared. "I don't believe 'e's a dye over forty, Farver, though I will sye you wouldn't fink it. He's gettin' older-lookin' lately, too, an' more worrited-lookin'. I was only tellin' 'im so this very mornin' w'en 'e

was in 'ere tellin' me to look more cheerful, an' 'im wiv a face like a funeral!"

"I wonder why!"

"I dunno, I'm sure. It might be as 'is wife is growin' worse, but I dunno. I've me own ideas abaht it!"

"Let's hear them, Maggie."

She hesitated.

"Well," she said then, "seein' as you're the priest, I'll tell yer wot I fink, Farver. I don't 'old talkin' abaht people be'ind people's backs, but this is diff'rent, I fink. Doctor Marsden said a funny fink to me this mornin', an' it got me puzzled, it did. 'E was a-testin' an' a-'ammerin' at me chest, you know the sort o'things doctors do. 'E was mutterin' to 'isself, an' then 'e says I've got a fine consichooshin. I knowed that. If I 'adn't I'd 'a' been dead long ago, bein' out in all weathers, rain, sleet, snow, or fine. I tells 'im that an' 'e laughed—not 'earty-like, just sort o' short, an' 'e says: 'I could 'a' given you another treatment than this, but they'd say I'm poisoning you.' Them wasn't 'is very words—there was long words in it I didn't understand, but that's wot 'e meant. I says to 'im: 'Don't you worrit wot people like that there Warbrick says; it's jealousy.'"

"Warbrick?" Father Austin asked. "Did you men Doctor Warbrick?"

"That's 'im," Maggie went on. "A dirty little rat of 'a man, 'e is. Any'ow, when I said that, Doctor Marsden looked at me sort of frightened-like an' then very old-fashioned-lookin'. 'So it's Warbrick, is it?' 'e says, an' mindjew, Farver, 'e was not talkin' to me, 'e was talkin' to hissself. I fought p'raps I'd said too much, so I says, 'Don't chew pay no attention to what people says, Doctor,' and then Doctor Marsden pushed 'is instrument things inter 'is bag an' shuts it up wiv a

snap. Then 'e laughed real nasty. I never sor 'im like that afore."

"'Thank you, Maggie O'Riordan,' 'e says 'You've given me an idea.' Then he went aht. Now what djew think 'e was gettin' at, Farver?'"

"I'm sure I don't know, Maggie," Father Austin replied absently.

CHAPTER XI

PNEUMONIA OR . . . ?

ON leaving the old flower-seller Father Austin felt worried and would have been glad of Gilmartin's presence if only for the opportunity it would give him to put his thoughts and suspicions into words, but his priestly duties came first and he continued on his round of sick calls to the poor houses in his parish where both spiritual and bodily needs required his presence. The son of a rich solicitor, he had more than sufficient money for his own modest necessities and was glad to alleviate the hardships of his flock. As he went on his way he could not help thinking of the fact that though his sick parishioners were mostly Doctor Marsden's patients he had not met the latter at any bedside since the day of their interview at the Audrey Street surgery. Reproaching himself for the unvoiced suspicion, he wondered if the doctor were avoiding him. It might be mere coincidence, for he knew that whereas one person seemed continually to encounter another in the most unlikely places, it often happened that neighbours whose daily occupations crossed each other's paths at every step hardly ever saw each other from one week to another.

Nor did Maggie O'Riordan's story conduce to his peace of mind. What was he to deduce from it? Was this Warbrick—by all accounts a nasty piece of work—capable of going to extremes in his mad jealousy of his fellow-practitioner's success and popularity to discredit him before all men? On

the other hand, was Marsden in his fanatical zeal for the idea of euthanasia capable of putting aside his finer feelings and instincts to the extent of using Warbrick as a scapegoat for his own misdeeds? Or was it—— But no, the priest in his fear of uncharitableness put the next thought aside—or rather tried to do so, for it would return persistently. Was Doctor Marsden, whose married life through no fault of his own had been so disappointing, so infatuated with the girl Joan Cresswell that he was ready to do anything—even commit a crime—to attain the end he desired?

Father Austin, finding no answer to any of his questions, tried to formulate objections to them. Objections there were certainly, but they left the matter in his mind where it was before. Was there anything worth worrying about, or were they all making a mountain out of a mole-hill?

His thoughts turned to Peter Barshott. How was it with that talented young journalist? A likeable young fellow! Not a Catholic, but with a philosophy of life with which no Catholic could quarrel. Father Austin had from their first meeting thought a great deal about him and had found in him a kindred spirit. He made no excuses to himself for his interest in this young man not of his flock who was so eager for truth and decency in all things. Did Barshott not come under the category of those who were “as sheep not having a shepherd”? Was this illness of Barshott anything more than the prevailing influenza which even now was giving doctors and priests more work than they could cope with? Or was it a fulfilment of the threat contained in the anonymous letters? Or again was the anonymous letter-writer merely indulging in a piece of intelligent anticipation?

Round and round the thoughts coursed in his mind, jumbled and confused! Question followed question, but there were no answers. Father Austin

visited his sick and in spite of himself the thoughts accompanied him. They came between him and the pages of the breviary when he reached his presbytery, and he found himself reading the words of the Psalms without actual consciousness of their meaning.

The days passed and his mind grew no easier. At last, during a respite from the incessant work of his office, he suddenly made up his mind to visit Barshott. It would be merely a friendly visit, yet perhaps one which would be fruitful in good results. He put on an overcoat and went out into the cold damp street. He found Barshott's flat and pressed the bell. A faint buzz from the other side of the door seemed to him ominous even before a woman dressed in the uniform of a nurse came to the door, opened it silently and held a finger to her lips.

"Mr. Barshott?" Father Austin asked in a whisper. "How is he?"

"Very ill, sir," the nurse answered; "I'm afraid you can't see him."

The priest had been turning down his coat-collar as he spoke.

"Oh!" the nurse said, seeing the white clerical collar underneath. "Are you Father Austin? Mr. Barshott has been calling for a Father Austin in his delirium."

"I am Father Austin."

"Oh, do come in, then," the girl invited. "It might ease him if he knows that you are there, though of course he won't know you."

She took the priest's coat and led him to the sick-room. Barshott was lying motionless, his face worn and wasted and distorted with suffering. His breathing was coming with difficulty.

"What is it?" Father Austin whispered. "Pneumonia?"

"Yes. Double!" the girl answered.

As if feeling their presence the sick man moved

and muttered something. The muttering became louder, then words became distinguishable: "Deacon—Father Austin—Austin—Deacon tell Deacon—priest—Father Austin."

"He has been talking about priests and deacons all day like that," the nurse said.

Father Austin did not explain the significance of the word "Deacon". He went over to the bed and caught hold of the sick man's hand.

"I'm Father Austin, Barshott," he said aloud. "Austin here—speaking to you!"

At last the meaning of the words seemed to penetrate the brain of the sufferer. The expression of his face changed slightly—appeared to become more at peace.

"Ah!" he half-moaned, half-spoke, though the words were little more than a mumble. "Father Austin! I know—know. I know how—Murdoch got it! Marsden——"

Then the voice trailed away.

The priest came away from the bed and beckoned the nurse to him.

"Who is attending him," he whispered—"Doctor Marsden?"

"Yes."

"Nobody else?"

"Yes; Doctor Marsden called in Sir George Matchby."

Father Austin nodded. It was the same consultant who had been called in Murdoch's case.

What did it all mean?

He left the flat, and abandoning a habit of years he called a taxi and was driven to Gilmartin's hotel. The ex-superintendent was not in, and the priest decided to await his arrival. He found the inaction irksome and wanted to be up and doing. Finally he jumped up from his seat in the lounge and asked a page-boy where he could find a telephone. The instrument was pointed out to him.

Father Austin went over and dialled the call, "Vic 7000." In a few seconds the reply came: "New Scotland Yard."

"Can I speak to Superintendent Meldrum?" Father Austin asked.

He was requested to give his name, gave it, and waited. There were various clicks and finally a booming voice came through:

"Meldrum here! Yes?"

"I am Father Austin," the priest said, "a friend of Mr. Gilmartin and——"

"Yes, yes, I know," the voice interrupted, somewhat interestedly, the priest thought, even excitedly, "Go on!"

"I have some important information for him," he obeyed, "on a matter about which he has already spoken to you, I believe. I am at his hotel, but he is not here."

"He has just left me," Superintendent Meldrum replied. "He should be with you in a few minutes. He said he was going back to the hotel. Do you think your information would be of any interest to *me*? If so . . ."

"I am sure it would," the priest answered emphatically, "but I don't want to tell it over the 'phone. This place is rather public and . . ."

"All right!" came the interruption. "Hang up! I'll be along there at once. Tell Larry I'll be there and save yourself the trouble of telling the story twice by waiting till I get there. Right? G'bye!"

A few minutes later Gilmartin arrived, was surprised to see the priest there, and wanted to know if anything had taken place. Father Austin told him of his conversation with Meldrum and the ex-superintendent nodded.

"Yes," he said, "we might as well wait."

It was not long before the big superintendent arrived and was shown up to Gilmartin's room.

The Irishman introduced his two visitors to each other and, knowing his ex-colleague, called for beer. When it had been placed before his callers the superintendent nodded at the priest.

"Carry on, Father," he said.

Father Austin, who had been thinking over what he should say, decided to tell in the first place of his conversation with Maggie O'Riordan, and he therefore began with this. He was not disappointed with the effect he produced. He then described his visit of that evening to the journalist's sick-room.

"Phew!" the superintendent whistled. "That's bad! It's not evidence, but it's bad—very bad indeed!"

"It certainly looks as if our friend Marsden is being a bit too clever," Gilmartin said.

"Or too stupid," Father Austin added.

"Same thing in this case?" Meldrum said.

"What are we going to do about it?" Gilmartin asked.

"It's a devil," the superintendent declared thoughtfully, "a regular devil! What the dickens *are* we to do about it?"

The two old colleagues discussed matters from every angle, going over every point from the receipt of the first anonymous letter, but in the end without coming to any conclusion or to any agreement as to the best course to be adopted. Father Austin had remained silent during the discussion. When it came to an end he said:

"I've got it!"

The others waited.

"Got what?" Gilmartin asked as the priest did not speak immediately.

"I am going to fall ill of a very bad cold," Father Austin told them, "and I am going to call in Doctor Marsden."

"Yes?"

"I don't like the idea," the priest went on, "but

it seems to be the only thing to do. First of all, however, I am going to prepare the ground."

"How?"

"I'm going to come out, horse, foot and artillery—yes, and Air Forces, about this euthanasia business—in other words, I'm going to let its supporters know that I am their enemy. All of this, of course, subject to the permission of my superiors."

Meldrum uttered his usual unmelodious whistle.

"What d'ye think o' that, Larry?" he said, cocking an eye at Gilmartin.

The latter looked at the priest.

"All I can say is," he said, "that it's yourself that is the brave man, Father Austin."

"I agree," Meldrum added.

CHAPTER XII

THE TRAP

THE three men discussed the details of the project. Father Austin allowed the two others to arrange as they pleased. He was already feeling almost sorry that he had proposed such a thing, not indeed that he feared for himself, but because of a certain reluctance on his part to set what amounted to a trap even for a malefactor. Gilmartin tried to console him with the argument that whatever the result the expedient would be justified. If Doctor Marsden was guilty of killing or attempting to kill the enemies of his pet fad, it was his duty as a citizen if not as a priest to help in his apprehension and conviction, whereas if their suspicions were unfounded the trap would not close its jaws completely and there would be at least presumption that the doctor was innocent of any such designs. The priest was not altogether convinced of the validity of the latter part of the argument, maintaining that a failure to spring the trap would simply prove nothing whatever. However, having proposed the stratagem, he decided to go through with it.

When these discussions had come to an end he spoke aloud of the matter which had been troubling his mind since the beginning.

"I can quite understand," he said, "that you, Superintendent should be more interested in catching a criminal than in any other aspect of the matter,

but I am more concerned with other things. What can we do to save Barshott's life?"

"Yes," Gilmartin agreed, "that seems to be the most urgent matter for the moment."

"Has he any relatives?" the superintendent asked.

"I don't know. Why?" Father Austin asked.

"If he has, the matter can be very simply arranged," Meldrum replied. "I don't mean that his life will necessarily be saved, but that we can arrange through relatives for the case to be taken out of Marsden's hands."

"I'd like to 'phone Deacon—the editor of *Unitas*," Father Austin said. "He might know. Is there a 'phone in the room? Oh, yes."

He went over to the bedside-table and took up the instrument which was there. A minute later he was speaking to Deacon at his home. When he had finished he turned to the others.

"Deacon knows only of a brother," he said "who should, however, be quite get-at-able—George Barshott by name, a don at Balliol."

"Then," Gilmartin decided, "as I am the person with the most leisure I'd better run down to Oxford and have a talk with him. I'd like your opinion, Meldrum, on how much we ought to tell him."

"My opinion," said Meldrum, "is that you tell him as much or as little as you like according to the impression he produces on you. I've heard that some of these university dons are strange blokes. Anyhow, Larry, whatever you say goes. The Yard will back you up, you know that."

"I thought it would," the Irishman replied, "but I wanted to hear you say it."

Meldrum laughed and turned to Father Austin.

"You wouldn't think an Irishman would be so canny," he said, "but Larry always was."

They separated—Meldrum to attend to a multitude of other duties and the priest to pay a belated

visit to one of his superiors. Gilmartin remained at his hotel for dinner. An hour later he was at Paddington on his way to Oxford.

Unacquainted with Oxford's colleges, and smiling to himself as he remembered the newspaper correspondence on whether their names should be written up on the gates, he nevertheless found Balliol with ease. Staircase No. 21 led, he found, to Mr. Barshott's rooms. The journalist's brother he discovered to be a young man with nothing of the traditional "donnish" air. The ex-superintendent was made politely welcome in the comfortable sitting-room, and being accustomed from long habit not to waste time, he came to the point at once.

"Do you know," he asked, "that your brother Peter is seriously ill?"

The Fellow of Balliol was genuinely concerned.

"No," he replied, "I didn't know that. He was to have come to see me a few days ago, but he wrote saying that he had caught a cold and couldn't manage it. Is he really very ill?"

Gilmartin had already sized up his man and promptly decided to tell him the whole story.

"Good God!" George Barshott exclaimed at the end. "What an extraordinary business! Surely no doctor would—damn! That's a silly remark! What do you want me to do about it? I'm coming up to London with you, of course, but that's not much good. What can I do to help poor old Peter?"

"One thing you can do," Gilmartin told him, "is to tell Marsden that as your brother's next-of-kin you insist on having your own doctor. Do you

know a good man whom you can trust absolutely?"

"Yes, I know the very man," Barshott replied, "a friend of Peter's too. He's not in general practice, but that doesn't matter. He's a good man—the best diagnostician in the world. I'll have to tell him all you've told me, of course. Will that be all right?"

"If you think it necessary," Gilmartin replied, "I think it would be as well—in strict confidence, of course."

"Naturally."

So it was arranged. Gilmartin returned to London. George Barshott and his friend were to follow by the next train.

On the following day there appeared in the *Epoch* a letter written overnight by Father Austin. Deacon, approached by the priest, had helped by taking his fellow-editor partly into their confidence to get the space reserved for it. The editor of the *Epoch* had done more. He had discarded a leading article on the financial situation in Esthonia and put in its place a vigorous leader in which he called attention to the priest's letter and welcomed Father Austin to the ranks of those who had taken up the pen in the cause of the sanctity of human life against the rising tide of paganism which seemed to be rising higher and higher until it threatened to swamp the world with its doctrines of materialistic well-being and expediency.

It was not necessary [he said amongst other things] to tell us that the Roman Catholic Church would stand firm on this as it has stood firm on other questions which it regards as essential to the spiritual good of mankind. No yielding to popular clamour, no talk of

“keeping up with the march of science” (save the mark!) has ever been able to divert one inch from its consistent path that great Christian Church whose devout adherents people of every country of the habitable—aye, and well-night uninhabitable—globe.

On the day after the appearance of his letter Father Austin was confined to his room with a cold. Superintendent Meldrum was, curiously enough, very pleased to learn that the “cold” was actually genuine.

Doctor Marsden came to the presbytery in answer to the priest’s call. He was in good spirits and twitted Father Austin on his letter in the *Epoch*.

“And,” he added, “though I disagree with it entirely, I must say that it is the best that has yet appeared on the subject from either side. I congratulate you on it, Father, though I may be tempted to answer it.”

He examined the priest and then took up his hat.

“I shall be back in a quarter of an hour,” he said, “and I will bring with me something that ought to put you right in a few days. Fortunately you called me in at once. I wish more of my patients would do that instead of waiting until they are too ill to move.”

When he had gone Gilmartin and Meldrum entered from the adjoining room, followed by a man who held a notebook in his hand.

“I wonder,” said Meldrum, “if he suspected that we were here.”

“I don’t think he did,” the priest replied. “He’ll be back all right.”

"If he does come," Meldrum suggested, "I'd like you to bring the conversation round to Barshott, and if possible to Murdoch as well."

"I have every intention of doing so," Father Austin replied.

In almost exactly a quarter of an hour the door-bell announced that somebody had arrived and the three men retired again to the next room. A moment later Marsden was shown in, carrying his bag in his hand. He laid it on the night-table and took from it a little sealed phial round which was a blue label. Placing the phial on the table he fumbled again in his bag. The priest stretched out an arm and read the printed inscription on the label.

"Anti-coryza serum," he read. Below this was the name of a well-known firm of Manufacturing chemists.

Father Austin held the bottle up between his eyes and the light and saw that it was filled with a semi-opaque fluid. The doctor, meanwhile, was screwing together a hypodermic syringe. He looked at the priest with a smile.

"Since you've got that in your hand," he said, "do you mind shaking it up well?"

Father Austin obeyed.

"What is this stuff?" he asked.

"Just what it says on the label," Marsden replied. "I don't know its exact composition, but it's certainly the very thing for you."

"Did you give this to Barshott?" Father Austin asked.

Marsden looked at the priest as if to see whether there was a meaning underlying his words.

"Yes," he answered then, "I gave this to Barshott, but it was too late, poor fellow. The harm had already been done. In your case it's different."

"How is Barshott, by the way?" was Father Austin's next question.

"He's in a bad way," Marsden replied—"very bad. Frankly, I am glad in a way that the case has been taken out of my hands, practically speaking."

"Oh? How is that?"

"His brother brought his own doctor along—a very fine man, incidentally."

Marsden did not seem anxious to talk about the matter, but Father Austin was persistent.

"You know," he said, "that I visited him."

"Yes, the nurse told me," the doctor replied.

"I am, of course, an ignoramus," the priest went on, "but it struck me that he was going the same way as Murdoch."

"You were quite right in so thinking," Marsden answered calmly, "but fortunately he is a younger and a stronger man than Murdoch was."

"Yes, but I couldn't help thinking of the anonymous letter," said Father Austin.

"I have thought of it many a time," was the reply, "but it's coincidence—a natural one. I have watched him carefully."

The priest did not know what to think of this.

"Would you just pull your arm out of your pyjama jacket, please," Marsden ordered, and prepared a pad of cotton-wool which he saturated with iodine. With this he rubbed a spot on the priest's bare arm. Then he took his hypodermic syringe from its bath of spirit and pushed the point of the needle through the top of the seal on the phial and drew up a cubic centimetre of the liquid. To do this he had turned away from his patient, and now he turned back to him, and stared at him.

"Hello," he said, "I'm not finished yet. I want

to give you a shot of this stuff in the arm. Pull your arm out of your sleeve again."

"I don't think so," Father Austin replied.

Noiselessly Meldrum and Gilmartin had opened the door and come in. The former reached forward and took possession of the hypodermic syringe and the phial.

"I must take charge of this, Doctor Marsden," he said.

The doctor wheeled round and started at the intruders for a moment. Then he looked back at the priest. His face at first clouded apparently with anger, then became calm, and, Father Austin thought, saddened.

"I am very sorry about this, Doctor Marsden," the priest began; but Marsden interrupted.

"No, no," he said, "please don't. I am very glad—believe me—very glad indeed."

CHAPTER XIII

ARREST

MEANWHILE ex-Inspector Peters, lounging around the district in the neighbourhood of the Audrey Street surgery, was becoming interested in the doctor "with a head three sizes too big for his body," for it was thus that even to himself he described Warbrick. Resembling to the life the navvy out of a job which he pretended to be, he spent a great deal of his time talking with the men of the working-class tenements near by who attended regularly to "sign on" at the local labour exchange. Through these he learned more and more of the respect in which Marsden was held by all his poorer patients, and confirmed his earlier impressions that Warbrick was very much less esteemed in every respect. Curiously enough, he could get hold of no concrete incident which might serve to prove that Warbrick really merited the enmity or contempt of his detractors. "He ain't no gentleman," was the general opinion, but the reason for this seemed mainly to be the fact that Warbrick invariably required payment before exercising his profession in the poorer districts.

Peter was by no means ignorant of the difficulties experienced by doctors whose practice lay among the weekly-rent-paying class, in recovering their fees, and he knew that life for such a practitioner is often a terrible struggle. He was, therefore, not inclined to attach more importance than was right to the opinions in this respect of his temporary boon companions.

On the day on which the trap was sprung on Marsden, however, he was witness of a scene which made him sniff the air like the old bloodhound he was. Further down the street where he was lounging he recognised the two-seater car belonging to Doctor Warbrick, and he went in that direction. Before he reached the spot where the car stood, however, Warbrick came out of a house near by. He stood on a doorstep pulling on a pair of gauntlet gloves and looking up and down the street. A man whom Peters did not at first recognise was approaching from the opposite direction. Warbrick had evidently caught sight of him also, for after a long look at him the doctor bore down upon the man. It was then that Peters knew the man to be Carpenter, the dispenser employed by Doctor Marsden.

Carpenter seemed to cringe away from Warbrick, who, small though he was, appeared to tower over him as he poured out what had all the appearance of being a torrent of abuse. Peters hastened his steps, for he wanted to hear what was being said. The abuse apparently stopped them, for there followed obvious questions and answers in a lower tone. The dispenser at one moment shrank away from the doctor as if he feared a blow. Peters did not dare to hasten too visibly into earshot, but he did what he could. Unfortunately the conversation came to an end before he reached the couple, and Warbrick went over to his car, shaking his finger at Carpenter. The ex-inspector caught only the last few words of his utterance: "... prison at the very least, and possibly the rope. I've a good mind to tell Marsden that. . . ."

That was all Peters heard, for Warbrick's car was old and had noisy gears.

"Golly," said Peters to himself, "that little devil has Marsden on the brain."

He slowed down until Carpenter came level

with him. In his assumed guise of working-man he greeted the dispenser.

"Good mornin' mate," he said; "that little runt don't seem to be none too fond o' you."

Carpenter was evidently still in a bad humour as a result of the encounter.

"What do you mean?" he replied. "You mind your own business."

"Oh, all right, mate!" Peters said apologetically. "No offence meant. I don't like that Warbrick no more'n you do."

The dispenser seemed mollified by this.

"Did you hear what he said to me?" he asked.

"I couldn't 'elp 'earin' wot 'e said as 'e was goin'," Peters replied. "'E's got Doctor Marsden on the brain, 'e 'as."

"He must be mad," Carpenter said; "I don't know how else to explain his way of going on. You've only got to be connected with Doctor Marsden and he gets his knife into you. Every time I've met him lately he goes for me. It's no use telling him that I'm not Doctor Marsden."

"What'd 'e mean—talking about prison an' the rope?" Peters asked.

"I don't know, I'm sure," the dispenser replied. "He seems to think Doctor Marsden's methods of treating his patients for certain diseases by means of serums—but you wouldn't understand that—are all wrong. He's got a kink about that, and I hear he's always talking about it to his own patients."

"Seems silly, don't it?" was Peters' brilliant reply.

A few moments later they separated, and Peters, having changed into his ordinary clothes, returned to the hotel in Earl's Court, where he awaited Gilmartin's return. When the Irishman finally came in, looking very worried, Peters made his report. On hearing the incident in the street Gilmartin was

at first mildly interested, then thoughtful. He made no comment, however.

"What about Miss Cresswell?" he asked.

"There's nothing much," Peters replied. "She just goes out every day and visits a lot of people—poor people who are sick in bed—and helps to clear up in their houses. She goes now and then to Doctor Marsden's and stays there a good while. She went twice in the last week to the Audrey Street surgery when the doctor wasn't there and stayed quite a long time. Yesterday evening was one of the times, and I saw from the other side of the road that she was in the lab'rat'ry—the place where there is a lot o' medicine-bottles and tubes and things—an' she was talkin' to that dispenser chap. When I saw that, I thought I'd listen to see if I could hear what they were saying. I went over and listened under the window, but I must have come for the tail end of their talk. It was sort of interesting, though, sir."

Peters stopped and waited—apparently for encouragement to proceed.

"Yes, yes," Gilmartin said impatiently, "go on!"

"When I got there," Peters went on, "Carpenter was saying—I wrote it down—he was saying: 'Miss Joan, do give him up, for God's sake. It won't do him nor you any good. You'll never be able to marry him . . .'. And then there were words I couldn't catch, and Miss Cresswell answered him very haughty. 'Mr. Carpenter,' she said, 'I think you are being impertinent.' Carpenter then began to say he didn't mean to be impertinent, and then a lorry passed by and I couldn't hear anything. Then Miss Cresswell looked like coming out, so I had to scoot, and that's all I heard."

"Very interesting indeed, Peters," Gilmartin commented. "What do you think of it all?"

"I don't know what to think, sir," the ex-inspector replied. "By all accounts this Doctor Marsden is a good doctor and a good man, and Miss Cresswell is a very nice young lady, and yet—I suppose there's no accountin' for what people'll do when they're in love."

The big ex-inspector looked so owlishly wise when he said this that Gilmartin burst out laughing.

"No," he said, "I suppose there isn't."

It was nearly midnight that night when Superintendent Meldrum rang at the door of Doctor Marsden's house in Bassingbourne Gardens. He was accompanied by another man in plain clothes. After some delay a sleepy maidservant who seemed to have dressed hastily came to the door.

"The doctor was called out," she answered their inquiry, "and I don't know when he will be back."

"Do you know where he went?" Meldrum asked.

"No; he took the 'phone call himself."

"We will wait," the superintendent announced.

The maid appeared unwilling to admit them, but Meldrum's foot was in the door.

"We are police officers," he said, and that was sufficient.

They waited for half an hour in the hall.

"It's my impression, sir," said Meldrum's companion, "that he's done a bunk."

"Perhaps," the superintendent replied, "but we'll wait a little longer all the same."

A few minutes later they heard a taxi stop at the door, and then the sound of a latchkey. Both officers stood up. When Marsden pushed the door open he stared at the sight of Meldrum, whom he recognised at once.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"I want to see you, Doctor Marsden," Meldrum told him. "As you probably know, we are

police officers. I have come to ask you a few questions."

"Come into my study," the doctor invited.

They followed him into a comfortable room furnished with leather-upholstered armchairs. A desk stood in the middle of it.

"I warn you, Doctor Marsden," Meldrum said when they had all seated themselves, "that I may have to charge you with a very serious offence and that you are therefore not obliged to answer my questions. Anything you say will be taken down in writing and may be used in evidence."

The doctor looked tired and dispirited. In reply to the warning he merely nodded.

"Do you know," Meldrum asked "the contents of the phial and hypodermic syringe which were taken from you to-day by me?"

"Yes," Marsden replied--"a serum which is prepared for the treatment of coryza, catarrh, influenza and the like."

"Do you know the exact composition of that serum?"

"More or less, but I have no doubt that the firm whose name is on the label could give you more accurate particulars than I could."

"Did you buy that particular phial directly from that firm?"

"Yes, I bought it personally."

"Was to-day the first occasion on which you had used it?" Meldrum went on. "Now, don't answer that question if you'd rather not."

"I see no reason why I shouldn't," Marsden replied. "No, it was not the first occasion. I had already used it for one patient?"

"May I have the name of that patient?"

"Certainly. A Mr. Peter Barshott."

"Ah! It was not very successful in his case?"

"No, unfortunately. It was too late."

"Then," Meldrum suggested, "if an injection of this serum is given too late, I gather that it is more harmful than otherwise."

"I do not know how you can gather that," Marsden replied. "Certainly not from anything I have said. My experience is that in such a case it is merely useless, but no more than that."

"Now another question, Doctor Marsden, which again you need not answer. Did you give an injection from this phial—this same phial—to Mr. James Murdoch?"

"Not from the same phial," Marsden answered, "but from another which according to the label contained an identical preparation."

"And Mr. Murdoch died."

"Yes."

"Of what disease?"

"Pneumococcal septicaemia."

"I gather that Mr. Barshott's ailment also appears to be pneumococcal septicaemia?"

"Yes, that is possible."

"Can you suggest why?"

"If you mean," the doctor replied, "can I suggest whence the infection came, I can only answer in terms which would probably be unintelligible to the layman."

"I see," Meldrum replied grimly. "I have a report here from a qualified pathologist, whose name you will know, to the effect that in the syringe and phial taken from your hands to-day in Father Austin's bedroom there are enough live pneumococci to kill every man, woman and child in the——"

The doctor rose, on his face an awful look—a look of the utmost horror.

"Live pneumococci!" he exclaimed, and his voice rose till it cracked. "Impossible! Oh My God! Live pneumo——"

“Yes,” Meldrum broke in, “and consequently it is my duty to arrest you, Christopher Marsden, on a charge of murdering James Murdoch, as well at the attempted murder of Peter Barshott and Father Au——”

But Doctor Marsden had fainted.

CHAPTER XIV

DOUBTS

"WHAT the dickens is this here New MacCocky when he's at home anyway?" Peters asked.

He happened to be in Gilmartin's room when Meldrum arrived to tell of Marsden's arrest the preceding night. The talk of live pneumococci was entirely above his head, hence his characteristically worded question.

"To tell you the truth, Peters," Meldrum answered him, "I have only the vaguest idea myself. Perhaps Gilmartin will tell us. He is a great man for this sort of miscellaneous information on obscure points."

Gilmartin smiled.

"It's easy enough to tell you what pneumococci are—the word is plural, Peters," he said—"but even that would hardly give you the right idea of the crime with which Marsden has been charged."

"Have a shot at it anyway, Larry," the superintendent pressed. "I'd like to have the thing clear in my own mind."

"Well, I'll try," Gilmartin answered. "The *pneumococcus* is the micro-organism which appears to be at the bottom of pneumonia. It has been called by other names equally objectionable such as *diplococcus pneumoniae* and *streptococcus lanceolatus*. Anyway, by whatever name you call him, he is a nasty little beast. It seems that when cultivated artificially he has certain characteristics different from those found in the tissues of a person

ill of pneumonia, but that's neither here nor there."

"Isn't it?" Meldrum contradicted. "It ought to be a very important point in this case."

"Then," Peters asked, "you mean to say that when this Marsden fellow pushed these 'cocky' things into a patient he was giving him pneumonia?"

"Yes."

"The dirty tyke!" the ex-inspector exclaimed. "And him a doctor!"

"Don't forget that the case against him is not proven yet," Gilmartin cautioned.

"I thought you had caught him in the act," Peters said to Meldrum.

"Yes," Gilmartin answered, "but we don't know whether he knew he was injecting live pneumococci."

"Oh, come!" Meldrum exclaimed. "How could he be ignorant of it?"

"And what does it matter?" Peters asked. "Alive or dead, they're not the sort of thing you'd push into a fellow's arm."

"That's just the point Peters," Gilmartin told him. "Alive they're just death to you, dead they might even be useful to you. I don't know about these particular ones, but in many cases that is so."

"I don't see how," Peters declared.

"Haven't you ever been inoculated against any disease?" the Irishman asked.

"Yes," the ex-inspector replied with feeling, "and I did not like it, I can tell you. It made me as sick as a dog."

"Well, then, the chances are that a few million dead germs—dead ones, mind you—of the very disease you wanted to avoid were pumped into you. I can't explain now the reason why that is done, but that's what is done."

"And instead of dead 'uns, Marsden was for

pumpin' in live 'uns into that there priest?" Peters exclaimed. "Mind you, that's clever, that is!"

"Yes," Superintendent Meldrum agreed, "and we'd have known nothing about it if it hadn't been for those anonymous letters. I wish I knew who wrote them."

"Might 'a' been that there Warbrick," Peters suggested.

"How could he know?" Gilmartin asked.

"That's a teaser," Peters agreed.

Gilmartin faced Meldrum now.

"You know, 'Drum," he said, "I have a feeling that you have been in too big a hurry in arresting Marsden."

"Oh, blow you and your feelings!" Meldrum replied explosively. "Why? Why do you think that?"

"Simply because there is a very serious link missing in the chain of evidence against him."

"What link is that?"

"How are you going to prove that Marsden knew that the phial contained anything other than what the label said it contained? Is it not possible that the manufacturers, Barrow and Hailey, isn't it?—isn't it possible that they made a mistake?"

"We thought of that ourselves," Meldrum retorted, "and as soon as we got the pathologist's report we went to the manufacturers first of all. They are prepared to swear that there is no possibility of error."

"What? They are ready to swear that it was impossible for one of their laboratory people to forget to kill those *cocci* before putting them into the phials?"

"I don't know about that," the superintendent replied, "but they are prepared to swear that they never cultivated a single pneumococcus at all—dead or alive!"

"That's certainly a nasty one for Marsden," Gilmartin agreed.

"It's fatal for him," Meldrum said.

"No," the Irishman contradicted, "not necessarily. Could not the phial have been tampered with between the time of its purchase and the first time of its being used?"

"Marsden himself declares," Meldrum replied, "that he does not see how it could have been tampered with. He bought it himself, kept it in a locked cupboard in his house till he needed it, and put it in his bag only immediately before giving an injection. He did not even carry it about from one house to another. Don't you remember how he had to go back for it from Father Austin's?"

Gilmartin shook his head.

"M'm, yes," he said. "But I'm not convinced. It would not take more than half a minute to do all the tampering that was necessary."

"Oh, more than that," Meldrum thought.

"Besides," he added, "the seal had not been broken nor removed, and the labels were intact. It takes time to arrange things like that."

The Irishman was silent for a moment.

"I'll guarantee," he said, "if you will buy two similar phials of different serums, to put the entire contents of one into the other—and the other into the one—without tampering with seal or label, in about two minutes at the outside."

"How the devil could you do that?"

"It's dead easy," Gilmartin declared. "Don't you remember that when Marsden was going to give that injection to Father Austin he did not remove any cork or stopper from the phial? He just pushed the needle of the hypodermic syringe right through the top cover of the phial. All anybody would need to do who wanted to tamper with the thing is to suck up into a syringe a few cubic centimetres of the original stuff and replace them

with an identical amount of the live germs by the same means. Evidently a protective skin forms over the little hole made by the needle."

"Oh," said Meldrum, "I agree that tampering took place. There must have been tampering."

"Yes, yes," Gilmartin replied testily, "but don't you see that if Marsden's counsel at the trial can put it up to a jury that his client is not the only one who could have done that tampering, then you're still short of that link I mentioned."

"M'yes," the superintendent agreed hesitatingly, "there is something in what you say, no doubt, but as I have already told you, Marsden himself doesn't admit the possibility of anybody else being able to do it besides himself. There's one thing I must say, though. The pathologist chap who helped us to search Marsden's surgery at Audrey Street and his house in Bassingbourne Gardens says that at neither was there any trace of cultures having been made. That, of course, might all be part of Marsden's game. I expect it's very easy to remove such traces."

"Quite easy, I should think," Gilmartin agreed.

"Did anybody question the dispenser bloke," Peters asked—"chap called Carpenter?"

"Yes, of course," Meldrum replied. "He swears that Marsden never did any work in his laboratory even remotely resembling the culture of organisms, but I don't take much stock of his evidence."

"Why?"

"Because he is prejudiced. He thinks Marsden a sort of little tin god. It seems that Marsden gave him the job he has now when he was down and out and ready to throw himself into the river. In fact, I believe he'd swear himself blue in the face in Marsden's favour even if he saw him committing murder."

"That's natural enough," Gilmartin declared,

"but doesn't it strike you, 'Drum, as curious that a man like Marsden who would pick up a nondescript out of the gutter from sheer charity should be capable of murdering a man like Father Austin, with whom he was on friendly terms?"

"But," Meldrum completed, "from whom he differed violently on a point about which he feels very strongly."

Gilmartin tapped the table in front of him, emphasising every word.

"There is no evidence whatever," he said, about the strength of his feelings on that particular point. On the contrary there is very distinct evidence in your own hands that he bore no ill will on the matter. You yourself, and I, heard him praise Father Austin's letter to the *Epoch* as the best letter yet written on the subject."

"That's true," Meldrum declared, "but that may have been in order to put Austin off his guard."

"Now, now, 'Drum," the Irishman remonstrated, "that's hardly fair. You're trying to twist every fact to suit your theory instead of forming a theory which will square with the facts. You will convince no jury in that way. Do you mean to tell me that a cultured man who is normal in every way as far as we can see—and we have therefore no right to assume that he is otherwise—bears ill will to those who differ from him on matters which he considers essential principles?"

"Why not? It seems quite natural to me."

"Indeed?" Gilmartin countered. "Then all these twenty-odd years that you and I have known each other you have been bearing me ill will, and you have believed that I bore you similar ill will?"

Meldrum stared at his old friend in horrified astonishment.

"Good Lord, Larry!" he exclaimed. "What's

bitten you? What on earth are you talking about?"

"About this, 'Drum," Gilmartin replied. "I know that you are a Methodist of a particularly enthusiastic type—for all I know you may be a local preacher. In any case you practise your Methodism rigidly, and I happen to know that you consider the Church of Rome to be something in the nature of Antichrist's Kingdom on earth. Now you, in your turn, know that I am a particularly pestilential type of Catholic. You know that I consider the Pope to be Christ's Vicar on earth, and that I consider your religious beliefs to be in very many essential particulars—don't forget that, 'Drum, essential particulars—to be not only erroneous, but obnoxious. Now do you mean——"

"Whoa! Whoa!" Meldrum stopped him. "You're all wrong, Larry! You and I have never had a difference in our lives on such matters. I know you're a Catholic, but I always consider every man to be entitled to his own beliefs in these things and——"

"Yet," Gilmartin interrupted, "you won't give Marsden the credit of holding similar views with regard to Murdoch, Barshott and Father Austin. You don't think that, just as I, a Catholic, think you a damn good fellow, though you differ from me on such a serious matter, and would no more think of killing you than I would of assassinating the King, Marsden also may be very fond of Father Austin in the same way."

"Well, if you put it that way . . ."

"Of course I put it that way. How else?"

Peters, who had been listening to this exchange with some astonishment, now put in his word.

"I'm not much good," he said, "at the brainy part of this business, but I'll say this: I do think the Yard ought to make sure nobody else except

Marsden could have got at that phial. The best way to do that is to elimi—what's the word?"

"Eliminate," Gilmartin suggested.

"That's right—eliminate all those who might have been in his lab'rat'ry. Now, I saw that young lady Miss Cresswell in that lab'rat'ry—and what's more, she was fiddlin' about with little phials and bottles."

CHAPTER XV

AN APPEAL FOR HELP

THE NEWS of the arrest of Doctor Marsden naturally excited considerable interest throughout the country and especially wherever newspapers which had given prominence to the "euthanasia" controversy were read, but nowhere was this interest of a more personal kind than in the district where the accused man had for so many years ministered to the sick poor. Gilmartin, passing through one of the mean streets, had convincing proof of how closely the event had touched the lives of the dwellers in the jerry-built houses and in the tenements of slumland.

Two little fellows clad in ragged clothes several sizes too large for them were busily engaged in one of those interminable street games which are the London child's only amusement. One, a little red-haired fellow with humorous blue eyes, was careless and had excited the ire and contempt of his comrade—a dark imp whose curly hair had to be blown or shaken away from his eyes every time he stooped over the pavement.

"Garn!" said the latter. "You ain't playin' right!"

"Aw," redhead retorted, "garn yourself! I'm gonna chuck it anyway. Fed up, I am!"

"Wot chew fed up abaht? 'Cos your ma's doctor bin took up for pois'ning people?" Eh."

"'E ain't bin a pois'nin' nobody," was the indignant reply. "My farver says 'e's the best

doctor in the 'ole blinkin' plyce. An' 'e is too! 'E cured me, 'e did!"

The other lad, obviously older, was puffed up with derision.

"Cured you, did 'e?" he said. "Lucky you wasn't pois'ned! My farver says 'e's just like Crippen!"

"Crippen yerself!" was redhead's inelegant retort. "My farver says 'e'll knock anybody's block off as says Doctor Marsden ain't all right, an——"

"Huh!" the other broke in. "Aw right! See if 'e'll knock my block off! My farver's stronger'n yours, an'—I says as Doctor Marsden's a blinkin' murderer, 'e is!"

Redhead at this proved himself an efficient deputy for his "farver," for in less than a minute he had effected considerable damage to the "block" of the contemner of Doctor Marsden.

Gilmartin with a long experience of the slums of London behind him looked on without interfering, and then passed on his way. Further along the road he was accosted by an elderly man of patriarchal appearance and a childlike smile.

"Hello, Chief!" the latter greeted him. "Come back to see some of your old friends?"

Gilmartin held out his hand, which was heartily wrung.

"Something like that, Bill," he replied, "but I didn't expect to see you. I thought you were still enjoying the moorland air."

The reference to the convict prison on Dartmoor seemed to amuse the patriarch.

"No, Chief," he said, "I've been back in my town house for a couple of months now, and I am not going back to the country for some time."

"Going straight?" Gilmartin asked somewhat ironically.

"Ah, that'd be telling, Chief," was the smiling

reply. "All I am saying is: none of these new busies they've got now is going to put me by! Now, if *you* were still on the job, I don't know!"

The Irishman laughed. He had always been on the best of terms with the old lags for whose conviction and imprisonment he had been in the past so often responsible. The old man now speaking to him laughed also, but in somewhat wintry and preoccupied fashion.

"You're looking worried, Bill," Gilmartin said, noticing for the first time his forced gaiety. "What's the trouble? Anything I can do?"

"No, Chief, I don't think it is anything in your line," the ex-convict replied, "though if I thought it was, you are the first I'd ask. It's all out of this Marsden business."

"What?" the Irishman asked in surprise. "The Marsden business? How the dickens does it interest you?"

"It doesn't interest me," was the reply, "but old Ma Slater who's the landlady of my digs is sick and Marsden's her doctor. Now they've lifted him no other doctor has come to see her, and she won't have the other bloke Warbrick, so I don't know what to do about it."

"Ma Slater any relation of yours?" Gilmartin asked.

"No, but the poor old thing's in a bad way, Chief, and I wish I could do something for her. She's a good soul."

The old lag was genuinely concerned. Gilmartin thought for a moment.

"Look here," he said, "you go along to the Catholic Presbytery—you know the place? Yes; well, go there and ask for Father Austin and say I sent you. He'll arrange something. He may be a bit under the water himself at the moment, but he will get something done. Tell him I'm going to get busy about a doctor too."

"I'm not a Roman Catholic, Chief," Bill objected, "and I don't know what Ma Slater is."

"That won't matter to Father Austin," Gilmartin told him. "You go and do as I say, and tell him I'm going to see what I can do on my side."

On leaving the old ex-convict, Gilmartin, who never even during his official days lost sight of the repercussions on the innocent of the arrest of a suspect, thought of the poorer patients of Doctor Marsden and of what would happen to them without a doctor to take his place. The result of his cogitations was that he called a taxi and drove to Barshott's flat, where he found the sick man's brother in residence.

"How is your brother?" he asked first of all.

"There is hope," was the reply, "but not much more."

"Is your doctor friend attending him?"

"Yes. He is in there now," George Barshott told him. "He would like to meet you."

A few minutes later the two men met and liked each other. Gilmartin told the others of his meeting with the old ex-convict and of the thoughts which it had provoked.

"By Jove, yes!" the doctor exclaimed. "I hadn't thought of that. Well, look here, if there is nobody else, I'll take over Marsden's patients for the time being, that is, provided Marsden consents. Can you arrange it with him?"

"I think so," Gilmartin replied. "I shall probably be able to get a permit to see him."

A few minutes later he left to see Meldrum. The superintendent listened to no more than the first few words of what he had to say.

"Thank goodness!" he interrupted. "Marsden has been worrying the life out of us to find some sort of a *locum tenens* for him. He seems to be thinking far more of his patients than he is of his

own case. He is also very anxious about his wife and her health."

"And that's the man you are accusing of killing his patients?" Gilmartin exclaimed.

"I know," the superintendent replied glumly. "I'm beginning to think that perhaps you were right, and that we were in too big a hurry. And yet——"

But Gilmartin was gone. A few hours later he had arranged that Barshott's doctor should as far as possible attend to Marsden's patients.

That evening the Irishman was surprised to receive a visit from a lady whose card, brought up to him, announced Miss Joan Cresswell. He went down to the hotel lounge and met her. He recognised her at once as the girl he had seen in Marsden's company at the Regency Palace Hotel. He saw now more clearly that she was of more than ordinary beauty which was enhanced rather than marred by the expression of worry and trouble which now was evident.

"I have come to you," she said at once, "on the advice of Father Austin, the Catholic priest who——"

"I know, I know," Gilmartin interrupted, and led her to a quiet corner of the room, wondering while he did so why Father Austin had sent her to him.

"He said," the girl continued, "that you would help me if you could."

"I will certainly do all I can to help you," the Irishman said at once, "if you will tell me how you think I may be of use. When did you see Father Austin?"

"To-day. He has a cold, poor man, but he saw me—and sent me to you."

She seemed to have some difficulty in opening up

the subject which had brought her there, and Gilmartin with his habitual good nature decided to make it as easy for her as possible.

"I presume," he said, "that it is Doctor Marsden's arrest which brings you to me."

She looked at him in surprise.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "You know?"

"Yes," Gilmartin replied, "I know—a little at any rate."

"Then—then," she hesitated, "then perhaps you won't want to help."

"Why on earth not?"

"Perhaps you think—perhaps you are convinced that Chris—that Doctor Marsden is a murderer?"

"No, Miss Cresswell," Gilmartin declared at once. "I am not convinced of anything of the kind. There are too many other possibilities to allow me to be sure of anything."

"But you suspect him?"

"Better put it that way," the Irishman said with a smile which was meant to encourage the girl and evidently went a long way towards succeeding. "Doctor Marsden is at the present moment suspect. In fact, he is the most likely suspect, but that is very different from saying that nobody else is to be suspected, and still more different from saying that he is guilty. I myself have a completely open mind on the subject."

"Then—then," the girl's look was pleading—even more so than her words, "you will help us to prove that he is not guilty. He is not—he could not be capable of such a thing."

Gilmartin hesitated.

"What you ask is not very easy," he replied. "You see, I have no official standing. I am merely a retired police officer—that is to say, nobody. That is what I told Doctor Marsden when he——"

"What? You know Chris?"

This was genuine astonishment.

"If by Chris you mean Doctor Marsden, yes, I have met him—twice. He consulted me—just as you are doing—on the advice of Father Austin, who seems to think that I can work miracles. In fact, Miss Cresswell, I am very much afraid it was partly as a result of that consultation that Doctor Marsden is where he is now."

"I knew nothing of all this—nothing," Joan Cresswell said. "I wonder why he never told me."

"There was no reason why he should," the Irishman replied. "It was a matter which concerned only himself at the time."

"But—but what was it? I don't understand."

"It was an anonymous letter," Gilmartin explained briefly, "which he said he had received. That interested the police, as other people had received anonymous letters on the subject also."

"What subject?" the girl asked. "I am really very sorry to be so foolish, but I really want to know. If he had only told me—but do tell me now."

This was no hysterical fool, Gilmartin thought, and there in the corner of the hotel lounge he told her the entire story of the anonymous letters, beginning with the death of James Murdoch and ending with the arrested attempt to inject into Father Austin the live pneumococci. The girl listened, horrified, for in the Press none of the details leading up to Marsden's arrest had been allowed to leak out.

"I—I never knew all this!" the poor girl whispered. "And Father Austin! Chris would never dream of killing Father Austin! You should hear how he talked of Father Austin's goodness! I am sure that Father Austin doesn't believe it now either. If he did he would never have sent me here to you."

"What about the Barshott business?" Gilmartin asked.

“ Barshott? ”

“ Yes, the journalist I have just been telling you about. You were very worried about his illness, weren't you? ”

“ I! Worried about—— But Mr. Gilmartin, I never heard of Mr. Barshott till you mentioned his name a minute ago. I have never seen him in my life.”

CHAPTER XVI

A POISONER ?

To say that Gilmartin was astonished would be putting it mildly, but his astonishment soon gave place to forcible if inaudible anathematisation of his own stupidity.

"Just like a young greenhorn at the game!" he said to himself. "Jumping to conclusions like that—as if there were only one Peter in the world!"

Aloud, however, all he said was:

"Really? I don't know how I got that impression. Perhaps because of some similarity of names."

"I don't know anybody," Joan Cresswell replied, "whose name is anything like that."

"Oh, I mean Christian names," Gilmartin said, "not surnames. You see, Barshott's Christian name is Peter."

"Oh! Peter?" the girl exclaimed. "Of course that must be it! I didn't know that you knew anything about Peter."

"I must say," the Irishman admitted, "that I don't know much about him, beyond the fact that he is apparently very ill."

The girl's face softened, and at the same time a look of sadness clouded her eyes.

"Yes, poor boy!" she replied. "He is very ill—very ill indeed."

"Suppose you tell me a little more about this," Gilmartin suggested. "It might be more important than either of us realise at the moment."

Joan Cresswell opened her eyes wide in astonishment.

"Why?" she asked. "What can Peter's illness have to do with Doctor Marsden's arrest?"

"I don't know," the ex-superintendent replied, "but I gather that he is—or rather was—a patient of Doctor Marsden's."

"Yes, but—oh! You don't think he would . . . No, you are all wrong."

Gilmartin smiled.

"Perhaps," he said, "but I am not aware that I have said anything which might be called either right or wrong."

"I know what you are thinking," Joan declared, "and I think it is horrible."

"Really, Miss Cresswell," Gilmartin protested, "you misunderstand me entirely. If I am to help Doctor Marsden I want to know everything I can about everybody who has been in touch—in close touch, at any rate—with him. That is why I should like to hear what you have to tell me about this Peter whose health is causing you so much anxiety. I also want to know a good deal about yourself, for you have been very much in Doctor Marsden's company of late."

"I don't understand," the girl replied. "Why should Peter and I come into it?"

"You *are* in it," Gilmartin insisted. "So is everybody else who had anything to do with Doctor Marsden—in this sense at least: that your story of your relations with him may give some clue to what has been happening during the past few weeks. So, if you wouldn't mind telling me all you can about yourself and your friend Peter in so far as your lives have touched or run alongside Marsden's, I should be very glad."

Joan Cresswell pondered for a moment.

"Yes," she said then, "that seems reasonable enough."

"Good!" Gilmartin approved with a smile. "As long as you admit that, we have surmounted the greatest difficulty of all."

"I suppose," the girl began, "I'd better start by telling you first of all that Ethel Marsden—Doctor Marsden's wife—and I are cousins. That is how I came to know Chris at all. When Ethel first fell ill I helped to nurse her, and I got to know Doctor Marsden very well. Indeed I got to like him very much, especially when I saw how devoted and kind he was to Ethel after her illness, when she was sometimes rather difficult."

"Sorry to interrupt," Gilmartin said at this point, "but I'd like to ask a question or two about what you have said. First of all, what is Mrs. Marsden's illness?"

"Nobody seems to know," was the reply. "It is some internal complaint which nobody has yet been able to diagnose with any degree of certainty. She has long periods of comparative ease and then from time to time she suffers terrible pain."

"Now, another question, Miss Cresswell," the Irishman pursued. "During Mrs. Marsden's illness have you ever heard her husband make any reference to his pet hobby—the question of euthanasia, that is to say, the putting of sufferers out of their misery, as they say?"

"Yes," was the unhesitating reply, "often! He frequently used to say: 'Funny how one's intellect says one thing and one's feelings another!' He used to say that because, though he was convinced that euthanasia was right, he could never bring himself to apply it to somebody he really liked—or loved like Ethel. I have heard Ethel beg him

to kill her and put her out of pain, but he always refused."

"I see! Well, go on. Tell me about Peter. By the way, what is his full name?"

"Peter Corbell-Manners!"

"Not young 'Spots' Corbell-Manners—the son of Lord Urblestone?"

"Yes."

"Heavens! I know him quite well. In fact, I once got him out of a scrape. I used to prophesy to him that he would break his neck through reckless driving. I'm sorry to hear he is ill. What's wrong?"

Joan Cresswell smiled fleetingly.

"Reckless driving," she replied.

"Good Lord! Had a bad smash?"

"Yes. For a long time they thought he would not live. He seems to have been kept alive by injections of strychnine and things like that."

"Where is he? In hospital? Or in a nursing-home?"

"No, at his father's house."

"I see. Well, go on. I'm afraid I'm interrupting a lot."

"When Peter had his smash," Joan went on, "he was attended by Sir Peter Warley and Doctor Marsden, and later by Doctor Marsden alone. You see, Mr. Gilmartin, Peter and I have known each other for years—since we were children—and, well, we want to get married, but Lord Urblestone won't hear of it. He had a quarrel with my father years ago which he has never forgotten. It was over some business matter—however, my name was sufficient for him to put down his foot. That

meant that when he had his accident I couldn't even go and see him, so I persuaded Chris—Doctor Marsden—to carry news and messages. He did so because he said that it did Peter good to hear from me."

"How long ago is it since the motor accident?" Gilmartin asked.

"Nearly two months."

"Then he has not been making good progress?"

"Oh, yes, he had made wonderful progress, but then Peter is a mad boy. As soon as he felt a little better and stronger he got up one day and tried to go over to the window to look out. He fell and lay on the floor and caught a cold. Pneumonia threatened and of course I was uneasy about it."

"H'm! Yes! Wasn't part of your uneasiness due to the fact that Doctor Marsden proposed to give Peter an injection of serum?"

Gilmartin felt a little mean as he asked this question. Joan Cresswell hesitated.

"Er—yes," she said finally, "but that wasn't because I was afraid of Doctor Marsden doing anything wrong. It was only that I had not much faith in the injection itself. You see, Chris had told me of cases where it had failed."

"It did not fail, however, with Peter Corbell-Manners?"

"It was never given," Joan replied. "I objected so strongly that Chris did not insist."

"I see," Gilmartin answered. "Now, let us go back a bit. How many people know of Lord Urblestone's objection to his son's marriage with you?"

"Oh, probably a good many people. You see, neither Peter nor I have ever made any secret of it. Neither did Lord Urblestone. So there must be a good few."

"Does Mrs. Marsden know anything about it?" Gilmartin asked.

"Oh, yes. As a matter of fact she doesn't like the idea either."

"Why?"

"She doesn't like Peter. She says he is too frivolous and thinks he ought to do some work."

"I quite agree with her," Gilmartin laughed. "I have told him the same. A spot of work would not do Peter a bit of harm."

Joan smiled.

"I know," she admitted, "but after all he doesn't need to work. He will have plenty of money—and I have more than I really need."

"Is that why you spend it on the sick poor of the district?" Gilmartin asked.

The girl blushed. Gilmartin, not very well versed in the other sex, wondered at this, considering that she had spoken of her love for young Corbell-Manners without the slightest trace of embarrassment. Different from the girls of his youthful days!

"Oh, by the way," the Irishman, seeing her embarrassment, went on, "I don't know if you know a lady called Ma Slater."

"Oh, yes, I know Mrs. Slater very well," was the reply. "She keeps a boarding-house for men."

"Well, I know that she would probably appreciate very much a visit from you," Gilmartin told

her. "An old friend of mine who is a boarder there is very worried about her health."

"Yes, Father Austin mentioned her to me," Joan replied. "I was going to see her to-day in any case. Poor old thing!"

"Well," the Irishman said, "I think I have kept you long enough. Don't think that my questions were irrelevant; I think on the contrary that you will find that your answers have helped considerably. At least, I hope so. I have a glimmering of an idea!"

"Oh, so you *will* help to clear Chris?"

"If he deserves to be cleared I will do my best to clear him."

"I am sure he deserves to be cleared," the girl said forcibly.

"Then I wish he would give the police a little more help than he has given up to the present," Gilmartin retorted. "He acts as if he didn't realise what has happened to him."

"He probably doesn't care what happens to him," Joan Cresswell replied to this. "He is more likely to be worrying about what is happening to his patients and to Ethel."

"I think that worry is removed," Gilmartin said, "since arrangements have been made for his patients—including his wife, if she is one—to be taken care of by another doctor."

"I hope not by that awful man Warbrick," the girl exclaimed.

"Why?" Gilmartin asked with an air of well-counterfeited innocence. "What is wrong with Doctor Warbrick?"

Joan hesitated.

"I don't know whether I ought to tell you," she said. "It is really only gossip."

"If it has no significance," Gilmartin told her, "it cannot make much difference if you do tell

me this gossip. If it is significant then it might help us."

"Well," the girl went on, "Chris's patients don't like Doctor Warbrick, and from what I have heard from them he doesn't like Chris. However, that is nothing. You know, I am sure, Mr. Gil-martin, that when I visit the poor people round the district I meet some very curious people. I know, for instance, several men who have been in prison several times, and of course, I know their wives even better. One of these women happened one day to mention Doctor Warbrick in a strange way. I wondered, because he was new to the district. She told me then that her husband had known him very well in prison. When I met the husband a few days later I asked him if this were true. He said that it was. I'm afraid I could not restrain my curiosity and I asked him why Warbrick had been in prison. The man—he is a nasty little man—laughed in a very ugly fashion. 'I shouldn't ask too much about it, miss,' he said to me. 'All I know is that we used to call him the Poisoner.'"

CHAPTER XVII

PETERS CURSES HIS LUCK

MEANWHILE ex-Inspector Peters was cursing his luck. He felt that the task which had been given him was an ill-defined one. Even during his service at Scotland Yard he had never liked to receive the order to "Go and find out what you can about So-and-so!"

"I haven't got the sort o' brain," he used to say. "Now, if I'm asked to find out where Bill Smith was on the fifth of January at nine o'clock, I'll do it or bust, or if I'm ordered to bring Bill in for interrogation I'll find him even if he buries himself, but this 'ere muckin' about I can't get on with at all. There's nothing you can bite on, if you understand."

It was, indeed, owing to his ability to do the work of the sort he really liked that Gilmartin—rather against the Assistant Commissioner's will—had had him promoted to the rank of inspector. A very modest man, Peters knew his own limitations, and it was this knowledge which caused his dissatisfaction with his present work and its results. He had shadowed with a cleverness and agility which would hardly have been thought possible in a man of his size everybody who could possibly have, in his opinion, any connection with the case. He had even wasted a whole morning shadowing a visitor to the Audrey Street surgery only to discover that his quarry was Dr. Burton, the friend of the

Barshott brothers, who had taken over the temporary responsibility for Marsden's patients. Time and again he had followed Carpenter the dispenser with the sole result that he confirmed his previous conviction that the man was obviously one of those curious creatures who, having once established a routine, stick to it whatever befall. Exactly at the same hour every day the dispenser left his surgery took the same walk through the same streets, visited the same saloon bar for exactly twenty minutes during which he consumed two half-pints of bitter. Only on one occasion did he vary his routine, and that was when he turned aside into another street with the patent intention of avoiding a meeting with a man coming towards him. Peters recognised the man as a well-known criminal who had served more than one term of imprisonment for robbery with violence, and he smiled to himself. Evidently the dispenser was taking no risks of meeting this individual whose reputation in the district he must have known from its other residents.

Finally Peters tired of following Carpenter and concentrated on Warbrick. He found the latter a more difficult proposition owing to the existence of the doctor's two-seater car, but by engaging a taxi now and then, Peters found that he was able to follow the little doctor's movements fairly efficiently. He discovered nothing beyond the fact that Warbrick attended conscientiously to the few patients he had, and that he was sometimes—especially late in the evening after a visit to a restaurant which he usually patronised for his evening meal—not quite so sober as a doctor is expected to be. A curious fact, Peters found out, was that since Marsden's arrest Warbrick had not been heard to say a single word against his more popular colleague.

One evening, Peters, expecting Warbrick to go

for his evening meal as usual, was surprised to see him set off on foot in the opposite direction. The ex-inspector decided to follow him, pleased to have something to do which was not what he had done on the previous days. He did not find himself obliged, however, to walk far, for within a couple of minutes Peters came to the conclusion that the doctor was going to Marsden's surgery in Audrey Street. He was right. Arrived at the corner of the street, Warbrick hid in a doorway and watched the surgery where a light burned in the entrance hall. Peters imitated him, watching both the doctor and the surgery door. A few minutes later the door opened, as Peters knew it would, and the dispenser came out for his usual walk. The ex-inspector was not left long in doubt as to Warbrick's intentions. The doctor was not interested in the dispenser beyond assuring himself that he had left the surgery. Almost as soon as Carpenter had turned the corner the doctor walked up to the surgery door, took a key from his pocket and walked in as if he were entering his own house. Peters was momentarily at a loss. He had seen what obviously was a case of illegal entry, but then, he was no longer a policeman. As an ordinary citizen he should immediately go and look for a constable. By the time he returned, however, with a representative of the law, Warbrick might have done all he wanted to do and left; besides, he—Peters—wanted to know what it was that the doctor was going to do.

Peters decided to remain and watch. He moved nearer and hid himself in a doorway almost opposite the surgery. From previous watching he knew that he could follow the movements of anybody in either of the front lower rooms, provided the blinds were not drawn across the windows. He waited for the appearance of a light, but none came.

"Huh!" Peters grunted. "He's probably using a torch!"

But no! Neither was a torch used. What could this doctor with a head three sizes too big for him be doing there in the dark? The ex-inspector looked up and down the dimly lighted street, and seeing nobody, decided to cross over to the other side. Noiselessly he approached the front door of the house in which the surgery was located. He pushed the door; it gave to his touch. He pushed harder. The door opened and Peters stepped into the little hall. A noise of glass or crockery being moved came from somewhere in the back regions of the house. Carefully the old sleuth edged his way towards the place from which the noises came. Inch by inch he shuffled forward, trying to time each stealthy step to the intermittent sounds from the back of the house.

Suddenly his foot struck something and a broom which had been standing against the wall fell with a clatter to the floor. Peters held his breath and stood stock-still ready to dash back into the street. The clink of glass went on as before. Evidently Warbrick had been so occupied with whatever he was doing that he had heard nothing. The ex-inspector waited where he was, nevertheless, for another two minutes before he decided to make any further attempt to go forward. Then he moved, more quickly this time, though feeling carefully for other obstructions of the same kind in front of him. At last he came to a door under which shone a faint light. The sound of breathing seemed close at hand now.

Peters wondered what he should do. For a moment he thought of pushing the door open and demanding an explanation of Warbrick's presence there. He rejected this, however, realising that he himself would have found some difficulty in explaining why he was there. He stooped to peer through

the keyhole of the door. As he did so, the door-handle seemed to hit him a terrific blow on the forehead, while at the same time the top of his head seemed to be caving in. There were words whose sense he never distinguished; lights shone brightly before his eyes—then utter darkness, physical and mental.

It was perhaps half an hour later that Father Austin, now recovered from the slight cold which had been the pretext for this ruse of a few days before, walking home from a visit to a sick parishioner, came upon a man who appeared to have just left his two-seater car to come to the help of another man who lay unconscious in the gutter. The priest stopped.

“What’s wrong here?” he asked.

The man stooping over the inanimate form answered without looking up:

“I don’t know yet, but it looks as if somebody had given this chap his quietus. Here, lend a hand to turn him over.”

Father Austin stooped to help, and as he did so the light of a street lamp revealed to him the fact that the Good Samaritan was none other than Doctor Warbrick.

“Oh,” he exclaimed, “Doctor Warbrick, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” the other replied. “You’re the Catholic priest in these parts, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Tough neighbourhood!” was the doctor’s comment. “I often wonder there isn’t more of this sort of thing.”

“While speaking the doctor was turning the unconscious man over on his side and Father Austin as he helped realised and wondered at the extraordinary strength of the man.

“Phew!” Warbrick went on. “How the

dickens? It looks as if he had been hit back and front! He's in a bad way!"

He looked up and down the street, which was one which ran at right angles to Audrey Street.

"Now, why the blazes isn't there a bobby anywhere?" he asked. "This is a hospital case. We must have an ambulance."

"What about your car?" Father Austin suggested.

"No, it isn't safe to risk it," Warbrick replied. "He's a hefty big fellow and we'll have to have a stretcher."

"In that case," the priest said, "take your car and 'phone for an ambulance. I'll stay here with him while you are away."

"Yes, that's best," the doctor replied. "Hold his head like that a moment."

He went to the two-seater and removed one of the cushions. This he placed under the head of the unconscious man, and ran back again to the car. In a moment he had started up and was off with a grinding of gears. Father Austin, seeing that there was nothing he could do to help the unconscious man, began to study as well as he could in the bad light the ground in the immediate neighbourhood. Finding nothing of interest, he searched the man's pockets for some clue to his identity. Perhaps, indeed, the man was a Catholic and would need his ministrations more urgently than those of the doctors. He found nothing. The days had passed when Inspector Peters had carried a warrant-card, and visiting cards were not much in his line. The priest noted that the man's clothes seemed more dirty than was warranted by the state of the ground.

It seemed only a minute or two later that Doctor Warbrick returned, and his car came to a stop at the kerb a little further away than where he had stopped before.

"They will be here in a minute or two," he announced. "Has he moved?"

"No," the priest replied, "he has lain absolutely still."

"H'm!" was all that the doctor said; but Father Austin gathered from the tone that he was really concerned—if only professionally—for the man on the ground.

"How did you find him?" the priest asked.

"I was driving along fairly slowly," the doctor replied, "and my headlight picked him up as he lay in the gutter. I thought he was drunk, and all I was going to do was to move him to the pavement. Then, of course, I saw that somebody had coshed him."

"Coshed him?" the priest said to himself. "A curious expression to hear from a doctor's lips."

He knew that it was often used by the local gaol-birds. Perhaps the doctor had picked it up from them.

"Funny that he does not appear to have been robbed," Father Austin said aloud. "I've just been going through his pockets, and though there's nothing to show who he is, his money and watch and things like that are all there."

"Yes, that does seem rather strange," Warbrick agreed.

The arrival of the ambulance stopped all further conversation. The doctor, standing in the beam of his own car-lights, signalled to it and it drew up alongside them. After a very brief examination of the prone figure the attendants lifted it on to a stretcher. A policeman arrived then, to be received very badly by Warbrick, who refused to answer any questions.

"You know who I am," he said, "and if you don't know this gentleman here, you ought to.

We've both stood about waiting for you long enough. You can find us both to-morrow."

He took his cushion from the pavement, and signed to the priest.

"Get in, Father," he said, "I'll drive you home."

"I never miss a chance," he said on the way, "of letting bobbies and turnkeys have the rough edge of my tongue. I know them too well."

CHAPTER XVIII

VISITING THE SICK

GILMARTIN, thinking over his conversation with Joan Cresswell, came to the conclusion that there were two people whom he ought to visit. One of these was the Honourable Peter Corbell-Manners—called “Spots” by his friends. On the morning after the girl’s visit he therefore prepared to visit the young man at his father’s house. On the way he stopped at Barshott’s flat to inquire after the health of its tenant. He was glad to learn that thanks mainly to good nursing there was every hope of a good recovery—which, however, he was told was bound to be slow.

At Lord Urblestone’s house a manservant answered his inquiry for Corbell-Manners by telling him that he was “h’ill” and unable to see anybody.

“I am quite aware that he is—or was—ill,” said Gilmartin, “but he will see me if he is able to move an eyelid. Take this up to him, Jeames, and get a move on.”

“This” was a visiting-card—one of the few remaining ones unused from the time of his retirement from the Criminal Investigation Department. It bore the inscription: *Superintendent Laurence Gilmartin, C.I.D.* The sleek flunkey looked at it.

“Very good, sir,” he said, absolutely without expression. “Will you please come in.”

He showed his appreciation of the distinction

between a social and a supposedly official caller by leaving the ex-superintendent to wait in the hall while he apprised the invalid of his presence. In a few minutes, however, he came back, and in his expression was something which betokened greater respect than he had yet shown.

"Will you please come this way, sir," he invited with actually something of graciousness in his manner.

Gilmartin smiled as he followed him.

"What stuffy and uncomfortable houses these nobles live in!" he reflected, not for the first time in the course of a wide experience of official visits to the houses of the great.

Such reflections were, however, forgotten when he entered the bedroom of the sick man. The Honourable Peter Corbell-Manners was sitting propped up by pillows with little about him of the invalid he had been led to expect save perhaps a certain paleness which served only to accentuate the freckles which covered a rather ugly but not unattractive face.

"Hello! Hello! Hello!" a somewhat cracked but otherwise lusty voice greeted Gilmartin. "Come in, O protector of the poor youth of the country! This is a treat—a fair treat, so it is! Get out, Parkes, and shut that door! Don't listen behind it either! Oo! We've got some secrets—the police and me—I—me, which is it? Anyhow, get out!"

"Very good, sir," the servant replied, and "got out," his glabrous face actually covered with smiles.

Gilmartin, with a grin, shook the hand extended to him, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Well, Spots," he said, "I came expecting to see you a mangled mass, but you're looking none so bad. Been getting into trouble again, eh?"

The Honourable Peter sometimes affected what

he fondly imagined to be the speech of the "lower orders"—not that he would ever have designated the working-class by any such appellation.

"Gawd bless us, mister," he answered; "yah down't mean ter sye I killed somebody w'en I copped this 'ere packet."

"You nearly killed yourself, I hear," Gilmartin replied. "Isn't that enough for you?"

"Oh, quite!" Peter replied in his more or less normal voice. "Then why the honour of a visit from a high official of the police?"

"I'm not in the police, you young juggins!" Gilmartin told him. "I've been on the retired list for the past year and more."

"Oh, so you have! So you have! Yes, by Jove, I read about that in *Home Notes* or something. So this is pure friendship?"

"'M, partly! Friendship of the sort I showed you once before, remember?"

"Gosh! Don't I? Lord! I was in a bad mess that time!"

"You certainly were."

"And you got me out of it, old sleuth!"

"Yes, for a purely selfish reason," Gilmartin laughed. "By getting you out I got somebody else in!"

"You did, guv'ner, you did, but honest, I'm goin' strite nah, guv'ner," the invalid replied facetiously, but Gilmartin saw that he was wondering uneasily about the reason for his visit, and decided to remove the cause for any worry.

He laughed.

"In the first place," he said, "I'm a sort of Cupid's messenger—or did Cupid have any messengers?"

"What? What? Eh? You don't mean to say . . ." The ugly face was covered with delight.

"I do. I mean to say that a certain young lady

who is much too good for an idle young wastrel sends him her love and——”

“Whoa! Pull up there, Super!” Peter interrupted. “Is this one of your jokes? You’re not talking of—er—well, you know what I mean—my friends of other days as it were?”

“Not at all,” Gilmartin assured him. “I shouldn’t dream of compromising my reputation by carrying messages from those ornaments of the stage and screen. I am talking of Miss Joan Cresswell.”

“By Jove! Eh? By Jove, you *are* a brick! I say!” His very inarticulateness showed Gilmartin how pleased he was, even if the delighted smile which covered his face from ear to ear had not been sufficient.”

“How the dickens do you come to know Joàn?” Peter asked then.

“I will leave her to tell you that,” Gilmartin replied.

“When will that be?” the young fellow asked, now with a suddenly clouded face. “You know the guv’ner won’t hear her name even mentioned. He had some sort of a dust-up with her old man before he died, and—dammit—she can’t even come here to see me—and they tell me I’m good for another six weeks or two months of this.”

“Longer than that,” Gilmartin cautioned him, “if you get excited or crawl out of bed before the doctor allows you.”

“Gosh! You’ve retired, have you?” the young man laughed. “Perhaps you have, but, by Jove, there’s jolly little that misses you, old sleuth.”

“Not much,” Gilmartin admitted. “By the way, does your doctor come often?”

“Oh, yes, every day until lately—a chap called Marsden. If you know Joan you probably know him. Lately, however, it seems he’s off colour or

something, and another bloke comes now. A good fellow too. I remembered him at once. He was a devil of a swell at Oxford when I was a fresher. Chappie called Burton. Know him?"

"I've met him," Gilmartin confessed. "A good doctor, they say."

"Seems all right."

"He didn't say what was wrong with Marsden?" Gilmartin asked.

"No," Peter replied. "I asked him, but all he said was that it was something which might take a serious turn."

"He was quite right. It might," the Irishman confirmed grimly.

"I am sorry. Marsden's a good old chappie. White as they make 'em," the young man said with conviction.

Gilmartin smiled.

"You would, of course, say that, 'Spots'," he said, "about anybody who kept you in touch with Miss Cresswell as he has done."

"Lord! He knows that too!" the invalid said, eyes raised to the ceiling in mock wonder. "But, seriously, I don't say it because of that. I know a good deal about old Chris Marsden one way and another, and he's the real goods—no fake about him."

"Well, I'm very glad to hear it," Gilmartin said, "because at the moment he needs the good opinion of everybody."

"What are you talking about?" Peter asked, shifting in the bed.

"Look here, young fellow-me-lad," the ex-superintendent said, "if you begin to get excited I'll not say another word. I came to tell you something about what's happened to Marsden—if you did not already know it, but I'll go away at once if you start jumping about in bed."

"Spots" lay back on his pillow.

"I'll be good! I'll be good! You'll have to tell me now, or I'll get excited and my temperature will go up, and the night nurse will scold and—oh!—there's going to be a devil of a row. I'll be good, I tell you."

"Right!" Gilmartin said, and shifted to a chair beside the bed. "Just listen to this."

Slowly and in chronological order he told the young man the entire series of events which had taken place since the receipt by Peter Barshott of the first anonymous letter. He could say nothing of the discoveries made by ex-Inspector Peters, as he was still ignorant of them. Corbell-Manners listened in silence, only frowning now and then. It was curious to see how the rather foolish face seemed to grow stronger when its owner was faced with a problem which, though it concerned him only indirectly, was a serious one. As he finished, Gilmartin asked:

"Well, what do you think of that?"

The answer was prompt.

"I think that the police have put their foot in it very badly—up to the elbow, in fact."

"M'yes, that is possible," the Irishman admitted; "but how do you get over the fact that Marsden was caught in the act of trying to inject live germs into the priest?"

"There's only one answer to that," "Spots" replied. "Somebody else put them either into the syringe or into the bottle."

"How, by whom, and why?"

"That's a tickler, I agree, Super," Corbell-Manners said, and then stopped suddenly.

"Who is this Warbrick you mentioned?" he asked almost immediately.

"I haven't found out much about him."

"Better look into him, I think," the young man

counselled. "I don't like to think it, but it looks like as if he might do it to make Marsden kill his patients so that they'd go to him."

Gilmartin laughed heartily.

"And they call those things *Irish* bulls," he said.

Corbell-Manners looked blankly at Gilmartin, then realised what he had said and laughed also.

"It doesn't matter," he said. "You know what I mean. In any case, I'll lay any odds you like that Marsden didn't do it."

"What do you think of this 'euthanasia' business, Spots?" Gilmartin asked.

"I think it's all my eye," was the reply. "It's a good peg to hang old Chris Marsden on, that's all."

"I wonder," Gilmartin thought aloud. "It's such an extraor——"

"I say," Peter interrupted, "I've got an idea!"

"Spit it out!"

"Spots" Corbell-Manners hesitated.

"Now I've spoken," he said, "I don't like to go on. It's a perfectly putrid idea, but it just came into my head."

"Go on. Let's have it."

"Well, what about this? Suppose those jolly old injections weren't meant for that poor chappie—er—Murphy—no——"

"Murdoch. Then for whom?"

"For me."

"For you?"

"Yes."

"But who would do that?"

"Well, I don't know that anybody would, but there's two people who *might* do it—*might*, I say. Women!"

"Women?"

"Yes, er—you see, Super, this thing—er—me and Joan getting married and all that—isn't exactly popular in all quarters. There's one woman who

doesn't like it because she don't like me, and there's another who doesn't like it because—oh, hang it, it can't be that! ”

“ Can't be what? ” Gilmartin asked. “ Because she likes you too much? ”

“ That's about the size of it! ” “ Spots ” admitted sheepishly.

CHAPTER XIX

WOMEN'S MOTIVES

GILMARTIN made a characteristic grimace.

"M'm! that sounds quite nasty," he said, "and quite plausible. Of the two I should be inclined to favour the one that doesn't like you."

"Why?" Corbell-Manners asked. "I should be more inclined to believe it's the other one."

"Well, of course," the Irishman replied, "you know them both, whereas I know neither of them personally. Nevertheless, of the two the lady who doesn't like you is the more probable, especially as she has—or had—more opportunity for doing what you surmise was done."

"Then you know who I'm talking about?"

"I think so. Putting two and two together, I assume you refer to Mrs. Marsden?"

"Spots" said nothing.

"I see I am right," Gilmartin said.

The young man nodded miserably.

"I shouldn't have spoken," he muttered; "I'm probably all wrong anyhow."

"It's possible, of course," Gilmartin agreed, "that you are. If so, then there is no harm done. If you are right, it would be very foolish of you to have held your tongue."

"I know, but I feel a bit of a cad talking about women in that way."

"Look here, Spots," Gilmartin rallied him, "you are all sorts of a young ass, but you are not

a cad, so don't talk like that. There are only ourselves here, and you know I'm discreet, so just tell me how things have been in the respect you mention. First of all—about Mrs. Marsden. How much does she dislike you? ”

“ How much? ” Spots echoed with a short laugh. “ She simply hates me—heaven knows why—though I have my own opinion.”

“ Come on,” Gilmartin urged him, “ let's have your opinion. You're probably right, whatever it is.”

“ All right, as long as it's quite clear that it is only an opinion—in fact, as long as we know that the whole thing is only speculation from beginning to end.”

“ That's understood,” the Irishman said. “ Go on.”

“ Well, then,” Spots began, “ the first time I met Mrs. Marsden was when Joan hauled me along there to exhibit me as the one and only. The poor woman was in one of those wheel chairs and looked as if she was in constant pain. She simply froze me with a look when Joan introduced me, and gave me one of those ‘how-d'ye-do's’ that mean more than a smack in the jaw. I made allowances for her, seeing what an invalid she was. That was all that time, but the next time I went to the house she had me on the carpet nicely. Joan had gone out of the room for something or other, and Mrs. Marsden turned on me. Phew! I felt like a worm when she had finished with me.”

“ A few details, Spots,” Gilmartin urged. “ Try and remember some of the things she said.”

The young man made a wry face.

“ I remember them all,” he said, “ and they weren't nice. A fellow doesn't like to repeat things like that about himself. However, as you are an old friend, I'll tell you. First of

all she said: 'Well, young man, I suppose you think you've done Joan a great honour by asking her to marry you!' She said it in a damn nasty way, too. I said: 'Not at all, Mrs. Marsden; the honour's all the other way round.' 'I should just think so too,' she said then, and I agreed, but she wasn't satisfied. 'What useful thing do you do in life?' she asked then. 'Nothing very much, I'm afraid,' I said, and then I got it—hot and strong. You should have heard some of the adjectives! I was a contemptible young bounder, living on money that had been earned by others, an idle wastrel and what-not—all the ones you get out of the story-books. How did I expect a girl like Joan whose life was spent in being useful to others to marry a poor fish like me? Were the helpless and the sick to be deprived of Joan's help and sympathy and nursing in order that she might marry me and lead the sort of life I led?"

"Humph!" Gilmartin interpolated. "*That* was the trouble, was it?"

"That's how it struck me," the young invalid replied, "though perhaps I'm doing the poor woman an injustice. Joan does help her a lot one way and another, and, of course, once married, I don't suppose she could devote as much of her time to Mrs. Marsden as before."

"Nevertheless," the Irishman said, "it does seem an inadequate reason for wanting to kill you."

"Yes, it does," Corbell-Manners agreed, "though she did say that she would rather see Joan dead than married to me, and she must have put a witches' spell on me, because she said: 'I hope you will break your useless neck in one of your silly racing-cars before you can marry anybody.' I nearly did, as you see. Then she told me that

she would gladly kill me herself if all else failed. Of course, I took it all for the raving of a very sick woman."

"Sounds like a madwoman," Gilmartin declared.

"Between you and me and the bedpost," Spots said in a low tone, "I believe she is a bit dotty. No wonder, poor thing! It must be hell to be always pinned to a bath-chair, especially if you have been a gay young thing in your day, as she was. Yes."

There was silence in the room for a minute.

"And now, Spots," Gilmartin broke in, "tell me the rest of it."

"The rest of what? That's all!"

"No, it is not. What about the girl who is too fond of you for your—and her—comfort?"

"Hang it, I shouldn't have mentioned her at all," the boy protested. "Besides, as you say, she didn't have any opportunity."

"I didn't say anything of the kind," Gilmartin contradicted, "I merely said that Mrs. Marsden *had* the opportunity."

"Oh, well, this other girl hadn't, so—oh, damn! Perhaps she had!"

"Ha! Ha! You've remembered something! Come on! Out with it!"

"No, I'm hanged if I will. It's all wrong. If this girl was fond of me it isn't me she'd kill, it's Joan!"

Gilmartin laughed.

"It's very Irish you're getting entirely," he mocked. "No, my lad, it is quite possible that it is you that she would kill. Don't you know the old tag the woman novelists are always trotting out—and they ought to know!—'Hell has no fury like a woman scorned'?"

"Hang it all," Spots surprisingly declared, "if

you're going to sling quotations at me, you might get them right; it's:

Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned
Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.

and I'll bet you don't know who wrote it."

"You don't get out of it like that, Spots," Gilmartin laughed. "Congreve wrote it. Ha! That gets you! An old ex-bobby knowing his 'Mourning Bride', eh? Besides, no matter who wrote it, it's as true now as it was in Congreve's time, so tell the story to your Uncle Larry."

"I suppose I'll have to," Corbell-Manners muttered, "so I might as well do it now as later. The girl I mean is Doris Farquhar."

"Doris Farquhar? The girl who shares Miss Cresswell's flat?"

Spots nodded.

"I see. Go on."

"Oh, there's nothing to tell. You see, Joan took me to her flat once or twice and I met this kid. She's a jolly kid as a matter of fact, and I used to pull her leg a bit. She's a big laughing sort of girl. Anyhow, once or twice when I called, Joan was out and Doris was there alone. One day—er—dammit all, man I can't talk about it like this."

"All right! All right!" Gilmartin laughed. "I'll tell it. One day when you were in the flat you were both flirting a bit——"

"Hey! Hold your horses! I wasn't flirting. Don't make me out a bigger rotter than I am."

"You were pulling her leg, then," the Irishman corrected, "and that's a dangerous pastime too, sometimes. You pulled it so well that the girl's emotions got the better of her and she flung her arms round you and kissed you and told you you

were a dear and weren't you fond of her a little bit too and——”

“Oh! Hang and blow! When you say it like that it sounds awful!”

Spots began to wriggle with embarrassment, while a flush covered his pale cheeks.

“Perhaps,” Gilmartin said. “But that's what happened, isn't it?”

“Well, more or less,” the lad admitted. “Not quite, but near enough.”

“Shall I go on?” Gilmartin asked slyly.

“No, blast you, I'll tell the rest myself. Anyhow, I was jolly well fed up—embarrassed, you know. It's not easy to tell a girl you don't care if you never saw her face again.”

“No, the part of Joseph is *not* easy, whatever the divines may say,” the Irishman commented, “but we'll take it for granted that you did repulse the lady—that's the correct expression, I believe.”

“Repulse? No! I ran! Gosh! I thought I'd never get out of that flat alive. She went right up in the air, and what she did not say to me wasn't worth saying. She started off by telling me that she hated me, and then she changed her mind and——”

Spots twisted round and looked at Gilmartin.

“You're laughing!” he said. “And you're right, by golly! Look at me—with a face like the week-end before last—and think of a girl, mind you she's a pretty girl of her type! Not a patch on Joan, of course, but——”

“Anyhow, Joan loves you,” Gilmartin reminded him half-jokingly, “so there must be something about you. However, you got out of the flat?”

“Yes, I got out. I went downstairs and waited for Joan there. My Gosh! But Joan is wonderful! She asked me why I was waiting there; I bumbled some rot about not wanting to disturb Miss

Farquhar, and she just looked at me with that funny little smile of hers—you must have noticed it——”

Gilmartin smiled. He, like many another whose youthful days have long gone by, loved a lover.

“Well, she just smiled,” the boy resumed, “and said: ‘So you’ve already been up? I thought it would come to this. Poor Doris!’ Mind you, she didn’t say it nastily. She was honestly sorry for Doris. She’d seen all this coming and I——”

“Yes, yes,” the Irishman interrupted, “but we are talking of Doris, not Miss Cresswell, nor the sort of blind ass you were. What happened after that? Evidently your little scene with Doris wasn’t the end of it.”

“No, by Jove, it was not! She used to meet me accidentally o’ purpose and I used to try to avoid her. One day she got very angry and told me that she’d kill me if I didn’t see her sometimes. I’m afraid I was a bit of an ass then. I tried to pass it off with a laugh and I said: ‘Doris, my dear, how can you kill me if you don’t see me?’ She took it dead serious. She looked at me with those light blue Scotch eyes of hers and she said: ‘Peter, have ye ever heard the old saying that there’s more ways of killing a cow than choking it with butter?’ Then she hopped off, and I haven’t seen her since because the very next day I had my smash.”

“She certainly seems to be a very forceful young lady,” Gilmartin commented; “I must make a point of meeting her.”

The young man looked alarmed.

“For heaven’s sake,” he pleaded, “don’t let her think that you know a word about all this. I feel like nothing on earth talking about it at all, but——”

"Don't get excited," Gilmartin stopped him. "She will learn nothing from me. Now, answer one question and I will go. You suddenly thought of how Doris might have had an opportunity to get at you with those germs. How?"

"I don't know how she could get at me—or rather at Marsden's bottles, but I'm nearly sure she *could* get the germs. She's a medical student!"

CHAPTER XX

OPPORTUNITIES AND MOTIVES

SUPERINTENDENT MELDRUM was becoming uneasy. Doctor Marsden had already been brought up before the magistrate several times, charged primarily with the murder of James Murdoch and in addition with the attempted murder of Peter Barshott. Father Austin, no longer convinced of evil intentions on the part of Marsden, refused to give any evidence whatever. The Press, which often knows or guesses a great deal more than is published, was growing restive, and some of the more responsible organs were beginning to ask inconvenient questions, and surprise was freely expressed at the number of remands asked for and obtained by the police. The magistrate himself had given a broad hint to Meldrum which made it clear to the superintendent that he would be well advised to produce something more in the nature of concrete evidence than he had hitherto done, or to drop the case.

What irritated Meldrum perhaps more than anything else was the attitude of Marsden himself. The Doctor, his anxiety for his patients now allayed, was ready to answer every question frankly, was uniformly courteous and grateful for every kindness shown to him, and, while reiterating his belief in the necessity of "euthanasia", was firm in his denial of having either desired to kill his opponents, or attempted to treat even his incurable patients otherwise than as persons to be kept alive

and, if possible, cured. He reminded the police that in all his arguments on the question he had never said that doctors should put incurable sufferers out of their suffering, but that the law of homicide should be amended in order to allow them, under certain conditions, to do so. This, he contended, was a very different thing, and constituted more an argument in his favour than otherwise.

Marsden professed himself unable to suggest how anybody could substitute live pneumococci for the serum in the phial. He knew of nobody who could ever have had the slightest motive for doing so. Meldrum went so far as to admit to his prisoner that he now had doubts as to his guilt, and that he was anxious only to find out the truth even at the expense of his own reputation as a detective superintendent.

"I have never doubted it, sir," Marsden told him gently. "I realise that appearances are absolutely against me, but I am afraid that I can suggest nothing that might help to clear me."

Meldrum wondered, nevertheless, if the doctor had his own suspicions on the matter. His speculations on this point became more concrete after a conversation with Gilmartin, and he paid Marsden another visit in his prison.

"I want," he told the doctor, "to go over with you the different possibilities. To do so I shall have to ask a good many questions which you may answer or not as you please, but I'd rather you did, for I shall make them such as can hardly lead in any case to incriminating answers on your part."

The doctor smiled.

"I am ready," he said, "to answer any question you may put—that is, if I know the answer."

"Thank you, Doctor," Meldrum replied. "Now what I want to do is this: I want to go over with you the list I have made of those people who might

possibly have had access to your phial of serum. Some of the names I shall mention will probably be those of people whom you will be very reluctant to suspect, but please bear in mind that we are only discussing opportunity. Afterwards, when we have eliminated those who could not have had the opportunity, I should like to discuss the possible motives which can be attributed to those who remain."

"I see," Marsden answered. "That is quite clear to me."

"Now, first of all," the superintendent resumed, "I think the logical place to start is at your Audrey Street surgery, and there——"

"I am sorry to interrupt," Marsden broke in at this point, "but I think that you can leave the surgery out. I have never kept anything of the kind there. It is a curious fact that though there are various drugs—poisons—there, there have never been any of my serum there. You see, I usually administer serums to those of my patients who come to my house. The surgery is frequented mainly by my panel patients—the poorer patients at any rate, who can't afford to pay very much—and serums are expensive things. There have been cases, of course, when I have injected serums into some of those patients too, but for that I have always either asked them to come to my house in Bassingbourne Gardens or I have gone to their houses."

"Then you think," Meldrum said, "that Carpenter, your dispenser, can be left out of the list."

"Definitely. He certainly had no opportunity, to my knowledge, and I cannot imagine a motive."

"I see. Then there is your home. I gather that there you have, besides Mrs. Marsden, one maid, a cook housekeeper, and a night nurse for Mrs. Marsden."

"That is correct," the doctor replied, "but I cannot imagine why——"

"Sorry, Doctor," Meldrum interrupted, "but we are not yet talking 'whys'; we are discussing 'hows'. Now, who in your household could possibly have the opportunity of putting live pneumococci in the place of your serum?"

"Nobody."

"Nobody? Do you mean that you always keep your serums locked up?"

"No, I don't mean that, though as a matter of fact I do keep them locked up except during the short periods sometimes when they are in my bag just before I go out or after I come in."

"Then I'm afraid I don't understand," Meldrum declared.

"Now, Superintendent," the prisoner said, "ask yourself—not me—a question. Where on earth would my wife, or Nurse Murray, or the servants, get hold of cultures of live pneumococci?"

"M'm!" the superintendent said reflectively. "There's something in that—unless, perhaps, you made one yourself some time or other. Doesn't a doctor take specimens—or whatever you call it—of the spittle of sick persons?"

The doctor smiled again, perhaps at the method of expression.

"Yes," he replied, "a doctor often takes swabs, and specimens of sputum and the like, but believe me, the average general practitioner in London has neither the time nor the means nor in many cases the inclination to make the cultures himself. I send mine off to a pathologist, who does the necessary and reports his findings to me."

"I see. Well, there is another person who has access to your house—Miss Joan Cresswell."

"Joan? Good heavens, Superintendent!" Marsden exclaimed. "You don't mean to say that you think her capable of such a thing?"

"I don't know whether she is or not," Meldrum replied, "but she certainly would have as many or nearly as many opportunities as Mrs. Marsden."

"How? Where could she get a culture? Even you, Mr. Meldrum, would find it difficult to get hold of such a thing."

"Perhaps," Meldrum admitted, "unless I knew a pathologist who trusted me—or a medical student."

"A medical student? I doubt whether a medical student would be of much use to you. Now, an assistant in a pathological laboratory—but, good heavens, are you referring to that girl who lives with Joan Cresswell? Doris Farquhar?"

"Yes. I confess that she was in my mind," Meldrum said.

Marsden was silent for a moment.

"No," he said finally, "I can't believe that. What motive could either Joan or Miss Farquhar have?"

"Well, we haven't got to the motives yet," Meldrum reminded him. "Wait till we get our list finished. There's one more name."

"Whose?"

"Doctor Warbrick."

"Warbrick? For heaven's sake, why?"

"Leave the why out of it, Doctor," Meldrum again insisted. "You will admit, I suppose, that Warbrick could lay his hands on live pneumococci?"

"Yes, I admit that, but I will not admit that he could get at my serums. That is impossible."

Meldrum waved his hand.

"Well," he said, "that is the end of my list—for the time being. Let us turn now to possible motives, taking each name in order. First of all, though we seem to have eliminated him, your dispenser, Carpenter."

"I can't imagine that he would have any

motive," Marsden replied. "He didn't even know Murdoch or Barshott or Father Austin, as far as I know, except perhaps as names of my patients. That he could get from my books, for he keeps them for me."

"What about a motive for getting you into trouble?" Meldrum asked.

"No," the doctor said emphatically. "Leaving aside the fact that any trouble for me means the loss of Carpenter's job, he has on more than one occasion shown himself to be very fond of me. He is, besides, a very good dispenser."

"Which has nothing to do with it," Meldrum murmured as he turned a page of his notebook.

"However," he went on, "we'll write these things down. Carpenter:—Opportunity—none. Motive—none. The next is Mrs. Marsden. Opposite her name we can write: Opportunity possible, eh?"

"Just possible," Marsden conceded, "but there again I see no motive. She did not know any of the three men, nor would she have any motive for getting me into trouble. She would, in fact, suffer far more than I would from such a thing."

"'M'yes," Meldrum said; "but there is another possible motive. What about young Corbell-Manners?"

"What about him? What has he got to do with it?"

"He was your patient. Weren't you at one time thinking of inoculating him with some serum or other?"

"Yes, but I didn't do it finally."

"Mrs. Marsden doesn't like him," Meldrum went on, "and is very much against his marriage with Miss Cresswell. Suppose she thought it a good way of stopping that, especially if it could be done without suspicion being brought upon either her or you."

"The idea is preposterous, even if my wife knew enough about the effects of organisms," Marsden declared. "I refuse to discuss it."

"Very good, Doctor," Meldrum declared, "but I shall nevertheless write down against her name: Motive—plausible."

"You must please yourself about that," the doctor said. "I shall say no more."

"That is your right, Doctor," the superintendent said. "I shall pass over most of the other names till we come to Miss Doris Farquhar. She also has a plausible motive."

"How?"

"She is in love with young Corbell-Manners," Meldrum declared; and then; realising that he had broken a confidence, added, "At least, it looks like that."

"It may look as you like," Marsden said impatiently, "but really you must not expect me to discuss such a matter, especially as I have no personal knowledge of it whatever."

"Very good, Doctor," Meldrum said soothingly. "I shall therefore turn to Doctor Warbrick."

Marsden laughed harshly.

"I suppose *he* is in love with my wife," he said sarcastically, "and wishes to have me dead so that he can marry her."

Meldrum ignored this mild outburst.

"No, I'm afraid it is nothing quite so natural," he said. "Your practice is what he wants, I should say."

"But, good heavens, man," Marsden exclaimed with real impatience this time, and a touch of nerves, "he would need to be an idiot to think of such a thing. If he wants my practice he has only to make me an offer for it, and even then he has no guarantee that he will get my patients. Besides, we agreed that he couldn't get at my serums."

"We didn't exactly agree," the superintendent replied. "I can think of one way of getting at them. You're not going to tell me that you have never left your bag in your car while you went into a shop or something! Easy enough to drop a phial into it and take out yours!"

Marsden shrugged his shoulders.

"If that is the case," he said, "any Tom, Dick or Harry could have done the same."

Meldrum rose.

"Then I'm afraid I'll have to come to the conclusion that you yourself are guilty after all."

"Oh, for the Lord's sake come to any conclusion you like," the doctor cried, "only leave me alone."

Meldrum left him.

"He believes it's his wife," he said to himself on his way out, "and, by Jove, so do I!"

CHAPTER XXI

THE INVALID INTERVIEWED

SUPERINTENDENT MELDRUM left the prison convinced of Marsden's innocence of murder or intent to murder. Before, however, deciding on the next steps to be taken before the magistrate's court, he wanted an interview with the accused man's wife; but this, to use his own words, he he "funked"—for more reasons than one. In the present state of mind of the public, fostered by an impatient Press, he knew that much capital would be made of any interrogatory of a sick woman, and that he would almost certainly be accused of extracting a confession by inhuman and unethical, if not by illegal, means. He therefore determined to seek first of all an interview with Doctor Burton, George Barshott's friend, in order to discuss the advisability or otherwise of questioning Mrs. Marsden.

He found the Oxford doctor at Peter Barshott's flat, where he had installed himself in the room hitherto occupied by George Barshott, now returned to his duties at Oxford.

"Yes, I have been attending her," Burton told him at once in reply to his first question. "A very interesting case!"

"In what way?" Meldrum asked.

"In every way," the doctor replied. "Here we have a woman who for years had learned to believe that she was suffering from an incurable disease. She was—merely because her ailment was not

being treated. She was—with all due respect to my medical colleagues who have attended her—undergoing treatment for a malady she hadn't got."

"What!" the superintendent exclaimed. "You mean that the diagnosis was wrong?"

"That is precisely what I mean," Burton said. "It was a very easy mistake to make, because—however, you wouldn't be interested in medical details. I hope to have the good lady on her feet in about three weeks. In fact, she has booked a dance with me in a month."

Meldrum laughed, but inwardly he had grave doubts of the fulfilment of that promise.

"Then," he said, "do you think I can have a talk with her about this unfortunate business of her husband's?"

Burton was inclined to hum and haw.

"That is another matter," he declared. "She is in wonderfully good spirits now that she has been given hope of recovery, and she is convinced that her husband is going to be cleared of the accusation against him, but I'm not sure that talking about it to you would be exactly a good thing."

"Suppose, however," Meldrum argued hypothetically, "that there was a hope of clearing Doctor Marsden through her!"

"M'yes, that might make a difference," Burton conceded, "though to be perfectly frank with you I haven't the slightest idea how she will react to anything. I don't know if you have ever met the lady——"

Meldrum shook his head.

"Well," the doctor went on, "the first time I went to see her she received me in any but a cordial way. 'Another doctor to experiment on me!' was her attitude. Now she has become a totally different woman. Her nurse tells me that she was

formerly so fractious and unreasonable that it was impossible to please her—and, Superintendent, when an experienced nurse says that it means something. Now she jokes and is quite agreeable to everybody.”

“Does all that mean,” Meldrum asked, “that Marsden was treating her all wrong up to the present?”

“No. Marsden couldn’t ‘treat’—as you call it—his own wife. He had another man in—several, in fact, and he has merely been seeing that she had the treatment they prescribed. As soon as I saw her, I—er—had an idea that they were all wrong, and I communicated with the last man she had.”

“I see,” Meldrum said. “Now, from what you have said, Doctor, I should think an interview with her is fairly safe. Suppose, for instance, you were present.”

“When do you want to see her?”

“As soon as possible.”

“All right,” Burton agreed, “I’ll go with you.”

“How is young Barshott?” Meldrum asked as they prepared to go.

“Oh, we’ll pull him through,” was the cheerful reply. “He’s just beginning to take notice. Don’t think, though, that you’re going to have an interview with *him*! You are *not*!”

They arrived at the house in Bassingbourne Gardens and were at once admitted to the drawing-room, where they found Mrs. Marsden installed in her wheel-chair chatting cheerfully to Joan Cresswell. Meldrum would willingly have dispensed with the girl’s presence, but her cousin insisted on keeping her there. Burton introduced the superintendent, who was received with a smile.

“Oh, you are the policeman who arrested my husband!” she said. “When are you going to release him?”

Not often taken aback, Meldrum this time was embarrassed. He did not know how to answer this invalid—this woman still young upon whom suffering had left its imprint—and he mumbled something about hoping it would be soon. Burton came to the rescue.

“Superintendent Meldrum thinks,” he said, “that you may perhaps help by answering his questions to clear Doctor Marsden of the accusations”

“Oh, if I can do that,” Mrs. Marsden replied, “I shall be delighted to answer all the questions in the world. Do please ask them, Mr.—or should I say Superintendent?—Meldrum.”

Meldrum, watching her, could not realise that this was the woman who had spoken to young Corbell-Manners in the way described to him by Gilmartin. Her eyes, though still bearing the trace of sleepless nights of pain, sparkled and had in them a softness not compatible with a person of the type he had imagined.

“Before I ask any questions, Mrs. Marsden,” the superintendent began, “I should like to tell you that my theory at present is that somebody who wished harm either to Doctor Marsden or to certain of his patients placed those live germs in one of his little bottles of serum.”

“That does seem to be an explanation,” Mrs. Marsden agreed, “though I really do not know how it could have been done. Chris is always so careful with his poisons and things.”

“So I have been told by Doctor Marsden himself,” Meldrum replied, “but even the most careful of us have our lapses from time to time. You, as his wife, must have noticed many an occasion when it would have been possible to get hold of the doctor’s poisons and serums and the like.”

“I am afraid, Mr. Meldrum,” the woman in the

wheel-chair replied, "that I have never taken much interest in matters of the sort. You see, for years I have been inclined to be rather egocentric."

Meldrum was not quite sure what the last word meant, but the context gave him a clue to the general sense.

"Of course, of course!" he said in his best paternally indulgent manner. "I quite understand that you—er—had other things to think of, but—m'm—haven't you ever noticed Doctor Marsden's bag lying about?"

"I have seen it," Mrs. Marsden replied, "not lying about, but sometimes on the table in the hall with his hat and coat."

"Quite," Meldrum said; "so that if anyone, say, who was in the house wanted to harm one of the doctor's patients he could do so by substituting one bottle for another in the bag."

"Yes, I suppose that is possible," Mrs. Marsden admitted, "but I cannot imagine anyone wanting to do such a thing."

"That is precisely my difficulty," the superintendent told her; "but assuming that Doctor Marsden is not responsible, that is what happened."

Doctor Burton began to look restive, while Joan Cresswell was looking anxiously at the face of the invalid. The latter was the only person there who seemed entirely at her ease. True, her brows were puckered, but as her next remark proved, they were puckered in thought. After a minute or so, she spoke.

"I have been trying to think," she said, "who could possibly want to be so horrible. We have had no visitors for—I've forgotten how long, so there are left only myself, the nurse, and the servants."

"And me!" Joan Cresswell declared with a touch of defiance. "I'm here every day."

"And you, of course, Joan dear," Mrs. Marsden added with a smile which seemed to the superintendent to be entirely one of affection.

Meldrum with a glance at Burton decided on a bold move.

"Suppose we examine the possible motives of each of you," he said.

The invalid looked at him quizzically for a moment.

"I do believe," she said, "that you suspect one of us. Yes, let's examine our possible motives."

"Oh, don't be ridiculous, Ethel!" Joan Cresswell exclaimed. "It's a silly idea."

"Oh, well, let us be silly, dear," Mrs. Marsden replied, "and do as Mr. Meldrum says; let us begin with me."

"Now, Mrs. Marsden," Burton put in, "I can't have you upset, and I warn Superintendent Meldrum that I shall use my authority as your medical adviser to put a stop to anything which might be harmful to you in——"

"Oh, Doctor Burton," Mrs. Marsden interrupted, "don't put a stop to anything. Don't you see that the only thing that would do me harm now is to think that Chris would not be cleared? Do let us get on with it."

Joan Cresswell advanced towards her.

"It strikes me," she said, "that everybody—especially the police—is taking too little notice of those anonymous letters."

"No, Miss Cresswell," Meldrum answered her, "on the contrary we are taking a great deal of notice of them, but there are other matters which——"

"Oh, I know that there are other matters *which*," the girl interrupted impatiently, "but I also think that more efforts might have been made to find out who sent those letters—especially the one that Chris got—it was typewritten!"

"We have not been so idle as you think" the superintendent protested. "We know, for instance, that the letter you mention was typed on an old Blick portable—the sort that has a little cylinder instead of the ordinary type."

The girl was about to speak, but Mrs. Marsden stopped her with a pleading look.

"Don't let us argue any more," the invalid begged. "It is such a waste of time. Now Mr. Meldrum?"

When it came to the point Meldrum hardly knew what to say. She was disconcerting—this woman in the wheel-chair. He coughed.

"Er—well," he said, "I suppose we can take it for granted that you wouldn't gain anything by Doctor Marsden's death or imprisonment."

"I shouldn't take it for granted," was the astonishingly calm reply, "but it is none the less true. If I lose Chris I lose everything."

There was no doubting the sincerity of the last phrase.

"And now," Meldrum asked, "what about your husband's patients?"

"I do not know many of them," was the reply, "and certainly not the three gentlemen who are in question."

"There is, however," the superintendent went on, "a possibility that the germs were not intended for any of these three men. Suppose, Mrs. Marsden, you had intended them for somebody else—that you thought Doctor Marsden was going elsewhere than to them!"

"I hadn't thought of that, Mrs. Marsden replied, "but it sounds plausible. The only drawback is that I don't think I have any such enmity for any of my husband's patients."

"What about Mr. Corbell-Manners?" Meldrum asked suddenly.

Before anybody could say a word, Joan Cresswell was on her feet, furiously angry.

"You—you beast!" she cried. "You have no right to talk like that. Ethel doesn't hate Peter. That is all over and——"

"Hush! Hush! Joan dear!" the invalid interrupted. "Don't get so excited."

She faced Meldrum.

"You are quite right!" she said. "I was furiously jealous of young Peter Corbell-Manners. I didn't want him to take Joan away from me, and I am afraid I was not very nice to him, but it never occurred to me to wi——"

"Of course it didn't, Ethel," Joan broke in. Besides, how could you have typed that letter to Chris?"

"Oh, that typed letter!" Meldrum sighed.

"Yes, that typed letter!" the girl repeated angrily. "You haven't even looked for that Blick portable. If you had you'd have looked for it in my flat and found one like it, but you prefer to look for motives that don't exist. Oh, I shouldn't have said that!"

She stared at them all during a minute of dead silence, then ran from the room.

CHAPTER XXII

THE TYPEWRITER

MRS. MARSDEN'S expression of consternation and alarm was such that Dr. Burton rose and went over to her. Meldrum sat calm and apparently unmoved.

"I am afraid, Doctor," he said, "that the young lady has more need of your attention than Mrs. Marsden."

The remark had precisely the effect which the experienced old policeman desired. Mrs. Marsden laughed—a little shakily, it is true.

"Poor Joan!" she said. "She has had a nerve-racking time with one thing and another. I am to blame as much as anybody."

"She is young, Meldrum said paternally, "and she will get over that. But you were saying, Mrs. Marsden? I mean about your objections to Mr. Corbell-Manners."

Taken aback for a moment at Meldrum's matter-of-factness, Mrs. Marsden stared at him.

"Oh!" she exclaimed then. "You are really so disconcerting, Mr. Meldrum. I—er—yes, I did say, I think, that I had been very disagreeable to Mr. Corbell-Manners. I realise now, of course, that I was very selfish in the matter; Joan and I have talked it over, and it is now finished. Mr. Corbell-Manners is really quite a nice boy. I think it is a great pity that his father objects to the marriage with Joan."

Meldrum had for years given up the attempt

to understand the case and calm with which women can make the most violent *volte-face*, so he listened to this with his usual stolid expression which might mean anything or nothing.

"But," he said, "at one time you really did hate young Corbell-Manners badly enough to want to kill him."

"Hardly that," was the cool reply, "but I certainly was in such a state that I was quite capable of saying so."

"May I ask," the superintendent went on, "what it is that has brought about this change in your attitude?"

Mrs. Marsden smiled.

"Something very simple indeed," she replied. "Doctor Burton has invited me to dance with him in a month."

Meldrum looked at the doctor with a twinkle in his eye.

"Christian Science, eh?" he remarked.

"Christian Science be blowed!" was Burton's unprofessionally emphatic reply. "That's neither Christian nor scientific!"

Meldrum rose.

"I must be going," he said, "and—er—by the by, Mrs. Marsden, *you* don't happen to have a Blick portable?"

"No, Mr. Meldrum, I'm afraid I haven't."

As he left the house the superintendent saw Joan Cresswell obviously awaiting him at the end of the street. He raised his hat as he came up to her.

"I am awfully sorry," she said at once, "to have made such a silly ass of myself."

"Don't worry about that, Miss Cresswell," he replied. "As far as I am concerned, I see and hear only what I want to see and hear—no more and no less."

"Then you didn't take what I said seriously—

"I mean, about the typewriter?" Joan asked, walking on with him.

"Now, I wouldn't say that exactly," the big superintendent answered. "I took it seriously enough. In fact, I'd like to go along with you now and have a look at that typewriter."

"Oh, I am sure that that letter was never typed on it!" the girl cried. "It couldn't possibly be."

"Then that's all right," Meldrum told her. "The sooner we establish that fact the better—and the best way to establish it is to see the instrument."

"But how can you tell?" Joan asked.

"I can't," the superintendent replied, "but there are clever lads who can."

"I should have thought that one typewriter of any given make would be like every other of the same make," the girl said.

"There is certainly a family resemblance," the big man laughed, "but that's all, just like in other families."

"Oh, well," Joan said resignedly, "I suppose you'd better come and see it."

"I'll have to take it away, I'm afraid," Meldrum informed her, "but if it's not the one we want we'll let you have it back very quickly."

When they arrived at the girl's flat Meldrum looked round him with interest while the girl went into another room for the typewriter. It struck him that except for a few touches here and there the sitting-room might well have been that of a couple of boy students. A few books lay on the table—not arranged, but

obviously thrown there. He opened them and found them to be works on practical surgery, evidently often read, for phrases were underlined and whole paragraphs were in many places summarised in marginal notes.

Joan Cresswell came back into the room carrying the antiquated little typewriter. Meldrum took it from her and removed its clumsy cover.

"May I have a sheet of paper?" he asked.

She gave him a sheet from a package in a little bureau in the corner. Meldrum held it up to the light. Joan Cresswell caught her breath as she saw his expression.

"H'm!" he said. "Areca bond. Is this the paper you always use, Miss Cresswell?"

"Er—no," the girl replied after some hesitation. "I—I use different paper."

"May I have a sheet of your paper?"

Joan retired to the other room and a moment later came back with a ream of paper which had already been broken into.

"This is the stuff I use," she said.

Meldrum took the package and drew out a sheet. This also he held up to the light.

"Funny watermark, this!" he said. "A.P.S. inside a double circle—Associated Paper Services, Ltd."

"Yes," Joan Cresswell said, "I get this paper from a friend of mine at Letchworth. I believe they make it out there."

"Yes. It's not a paper that one sees often."

"No."

"I thought not."

Meldrum faced the girl and looked at her fixedly.

There was a sternness in his expression which she had not hitherto seen.

"Would you be surprised to know, Miss Cresswell," he asked, "that the anonymous letter to Doctor Marsden was typed on precisely this kind of paper?"

Joan had grown pale. She remained silent.

"Would you?" Meldrum insisted. "I want an answer."

"Oh," Joan answered impatiently, "nothing would surprise me in this business, but I know nothing about it."

Meldrum sat down and inserted the sheet of paper into the typewriter. With a nimbleness one would not have expected from his big hands, he typed rapidly: "Dear Doctor Marsden, Not long ago your patient James Murdoch died while under treatment by you." Having got so far, he stopped and took an envelope from his pocket-book. From this he extracted the anonymous letter, and began in silence to compare the type of one with the other.

"Come and look at this, Miss Cresswell," he said after a few minutes; "I think you'll find it very interesting."

Joan Cresswell came over and stood behind his chair. Meldrum took a pencil from his pocket and used it as a pointer.

"Look," he said, "at the capital d's; there are two in each; see how in all cases they lean back. Look at the capital M's! All of them are noticeably out of alignment. Above all, look at those small g's. They've lost their tails. Now, I'm not an expert, but . . ."

He turned round and again faced the girl.

" . . . But," he went on, "you don't need to be an expert to see that there is hardly any doubt that this anonymous letter was typed on the same machine as that sentence—and that sentence, Miss Cresswell, has just been typed by me on your machine in your presence."

Joan's "Yes" was a mere whisper.

"Yes," Meldrum echoed. "Yes. Now, I think that as an intelligent young woman you will agree that I can come to only one conclusion, namely that the anonymous letter was typed by someone who, if not a resident of this flat, had free access to it and to your machine. What?"

Joan had had time to recover her equanimity.

"Yes," she replied calmly enough, "that does seem to be the only conclusion you can come to."

"Now," the superintendent said, "you needn't answer this question, but I will ask it. Did you type this anonymous letter?"

"No, I did not type this anonymous letter," was Joan's prompt reply.

"Have you any idea who did?"

The girl shook her head, but gave no reply in words.

"What about the young lady who shares your flat?" Meldrum asked. "Miss—er—Farquhar, I believe."

Again no reply.

"I see you suspect Miss Farquhar," was Meldrum's unfair conclusion.

"No, I do not," Joan answered at once. "She is not capable of such a thing."

"Hum! Hum!" the superintendent murmured.
 "That's as may be! That's as may be!"

Joan Cresswell shrugged her shoulders.

"When does the young lady usually come in?" Meldrum asked.

"At various times," Joan answered. "It depends on her work."

"She is a medical student, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"At the Royal Free Hospital."

"Gray's Inn Road—oh, yes."

At that moment there was the rattle of a key in the outer door, followed immediately by the irruption into the room of a very large young lady who apparently affected attire which was as little feminine as possible, consistent with her status as a girl student of medicine. Surely, Meldrum thought to himself, this was not the lovesick maiden of whom he had heard!

"Hello, Joan, old thing!" she called out, and then again, "Hell—oh! Who's your boy friend? Not a bailiff looking for me? Looks like one!"

Joan showed no appreciation of this facetiousness.

Meldrum grinned.

"Not quite a bailiff," he said, "I'm only a detective superintendent of Scotland Yard at your service."

"Crikey! Come to pinch me?"

"Per-haps."

Deliberately Meldrum had pronounced the last word with a grimness which he had often found useful.

"Oh!" Doris Farquhar exclaimed, completely taken aback, but more feminine than she had yet shown herself to be. "What on earth for?"

“ I think we’d better have answers to a few questions first,” Meldrum said, “ before I tell you that. Now, this typewriter—— ”

He moved aside from the table and revealed the instrument.

“ Hello ! ” Miss Farquhar exclaimed. “ You *have* got the old typewriter back, Joan. I was looking for it this morning, but I couldn’t find it. I thought it was still at Doctor Marsd—— ”

“ Shut up, you ass ! ” Joan cried, too late.

CHAPTER XXIII

PETERS COMES TO LIFE

GILMARTIN and Meldrum were sitting in the latter's room at Scotland Yard discussing their findings of the past few days.

"I can't understand Peters," Gilmartin was saying to his ex-colleague. "He is always such a methodical old boy, but this is the third day that I haven't heard a word from him."

"Probably," Meldrum laughed, "Mrs. Peters has collared him to do her shopping or help with the week's washing."

"No," the Irishman replied, "when I found that he hadn't been in the hotel, I went down to his house in Streatham to find out; there was only a sort of maid-of-all-work there, and she told me that Mrs. Peters was on a visit to her relations at Peterborough. She hadn't seen Peters himself for over a week. To tell you the truth, I am getting uneasy about the old boy."

"I shouldn't," the superintendent counselled. "Don't you remember how in the old days when he had his nose to the trail he would disappear for days on end and then come back with a prisoner in tow?"

"M'yes, but things are different now, old man," Gilmartin countered. "Peters is not so young as he used to be, and not being a police officer there is not the same necessity for staying away without reporting to me."

"He'll be all right," Meldrum declared. "Hang it all, man, Peters is just as capable of taking care of himself as you or I."

He had hardly finished speaking when the telephone bell summoned him. Meldrum lifted the receiver, and after his first, "Yes, Meldrum speaking," listened in silence. Gilmartin paid no attention, but sat thinking his own thoughts until the superintendent's voice roused him.

"Right! Thank you, Mr. Ingram," Meldrum was saying before hanging up the receiver. "Tell him that Gilmartin and I will be round there almost immediately."

"Eh? What's that?" Gilmartin asked. "Where are we going?"

"To Charing Cross Hospital," the superintendent replied. "That was the secretary speaking. I apologise, Larry. Peters is *not* equal to taking care of himself."

"What? He is injured? In hospital?"

"Yes, somebody's been knocking him about—and who do you think had him carted to the hospital?"

Gilmartin shook his head, rightly assuming the question to be rhetorical.

"Doctor Warbrick," Meldrum answered his own question.

Gilmartin rose and reached for his hat.

"That sounds interesting," he said; "let's go along and see the old boy."

Meldrum nodded and began to put away some papers that were on his desk.

"I gather," he said, "that he has been unconscious or semi-conscious for a couple of days, and that there was nothing on him to identify him."

They reached the hospital a few minutes later to find Peters still in bed, looking less vigorous than

they were accustomed to see him. The big ex-inspector was, besides, decidedly sheepish in his greeting of them.

"Sorry for this, Chief," he said to Gilmartin; "I was caught like any recruit on the job."

"Tell us all about it," Meldrum ordered. "There's no time to be lost in moaning. These things happen to everybody once in a while. Go on!"

Peters then gave a detailed and connected story of his trailing of the doctor "with the head two sizes too big for him" to Marsden's surgery, up to the point when unconsciousness put a stop to his activities."

"Then," he said, describing his final actions, "I decided to open the door suddenly and catch Warbrick there. I was going to ask him to explain what he was doing there, but Lord bless you, Chief, that door must 'a' been lifted off its hinges an' dropped on top o' my head. They tell me here I got *two* hefty wallops on the head, but it might 'a' been twenty-two for all I know, and all I needed was that one! The next thing I knew I was lying in this bed."

"H'm!" Meldrum commented. "Very interesting, especially when we consider that it was Warbrick that had you taken to hospital."

"You don't say!" Peters exclaimed. "They didn't tell me that. All I heard was that I was picked up in the street. The clever devil! Eh? To think of that, now? Knocks me out an' then does the Good Samaritan act! That's a good one, that is!"

Gilmartin said nothing. Meldrum began to go through his usual repertory of swear-words.

"What's that for, Super?" Peters asked. "It's no use blaming me, you know!"

"I'm not cursing you," the superintendent told him. "I'm cursing myself. We should have had

a man posted in that surgery day and night instead of just searching it in the ordinary way and then leaving it at that."

"No use doing that, 'Drum!" Gilmartin said. "I'm thinking of something else. Shouldn't the secretary of the hospital have some report from his ambulance people on the matter? And what about the policeman on the beat?"

"Yes, by George, that is so," Meldrum exclaimed. "Let's go and get hold of Ingram! See you again, Peters. Hope you'll soon be all right."

With a smile at the man in the bed, Gilmartin followed Meldrum out of the ward. They found the secretary in his office on the ground floor and questioned him. Ingram looked up his records.

"This is all we have," he said after a few minutes' search. "The ambulance was called out in the ordinary way by telephone by somebody who gave his name as Doctor Warbrick. The ambulance found the 'case' at the spot described. Doctor Warwick was there, according to the attendants' report, and somebody dressed in clerical clothes. A police constable came up and wanted particulars, which were refused by the doctor, and the doctor and the clerical gentleman drove off together simultaneously with the ambulance. The constable came on here later, I believe, but I have no record of what he did or said. I can only add this: that when the patient was being undressed it was noticed that his clothes were rubbed and dirty in such a way as to make it probable that he had been dragged along the pavement to the spot where he was found.

Meldrum and Gilmartin exchanged looks.

"That may be an important point later, Mr. Ingram," the former said. "I shall probably want the evidence of the person who noticed that."

"I'll make a note of that," the secretary said, "and warn him accordingly."

They left the hospital soon afterwards.

"I want to find that constable's report," Meldrum told his companion. "Let's get along to the Divisional Station."

They were not long in finding the report in question. Meldrum read the rather stilted document compiled by the police constable, which told verbatim the words used by Warbrick, and later gave an equally detailed account of the doctor's statement made at his own house on the following morning. This coincided with what Warbrick had told the priest, as Meldrum found out when he read further.

"Hello!" he said when he reached this point. "The clerical gentleman we heard of was your friend Father Austin."

"Father Austin!" Gilmartin exclaimed. "What on earth was he doing there?"

"Read for yourself," Meldrum answered, and handed over the report.

"I'll go along and have a talk with Father Austin," the Irishman said when he had read it. "I shouldn't be surprised if he knew a bit more than he says here."

"Then why the devil hasn't he told either you or me?" Meldrum asked.

"No! I'm an ass!" Gilmartin apostrophised himself. "He has never met Peters, so it was to him just an ordinary street accident."

However, they went to see the priest at his presbytery. Father Austin was openly astonished to learn that his nocturnal adventure had a connection with the case in which they were all so much interested, but he could give no further information.

"What a pity I didn't know Peters!" he said.

"Then I might have seen things with an entirely different eye."

"What did you think of Warbrick, Father?" Meldrum asked.

"I thought him an interesting fellow," the priest answered. "He came in here for a drink and a talk, late as it was, and I must say that I found him entertaining and amusing. A very well-read fellow too. I commented on this, wondering that a general practitioner had time for so much reading. He was a bit bitter on this, and said something about his practice not being so terribly exacting as all that, but he added a queer thing which he did not explain. 'I wasn't always a G.P.,' he said. 'There was a period in my life not so long ago when I had plenty of time for reading.'"

Gilmartin remembered at this point what he had learned from Joan Cresswell.

"A curious thing also struck me," the priest went on, "about his attitude to the criminal classes. It was quite natural that we should get on to the subject, seeing that Peters was the victim of an attack, but he was really devilish about them. He said that they ought to be exterminated, that he would treat every habitual criminal to a dose of Marsden's beloved euthanasia, instead of putting them into prisons where they live in greater luxury than in their own homes, and learn to be more proficient and more vicious criminals than before."

"I'm inclined to agree with him," Meldrum said, "but all the same I must look up the fellow's record. He seems to me to know too much about crime and criminals."

They left the priest.

"Where are you going now?" Gilmartin asked. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm hanged if I know," Meldrum replied. "I think we ought to go and see Warbrick."

"What for?"

"Ostensibly to inquire about the street accident."

"Yes? And then?"

"And then see what happens," Meldrum concluded.

They were within easy reach of Warbrick's house, but when they rang there they learned from a servant that the doctor had been called out of Town that morning. He was, she said, in Devonshire, where his mother was very ill.

The two men returned to Scotland Yard, where they held a conference with the Assistant Commissioner and the other superintendents there present. Gilmartin as an old colleague interested in the case was admitted to their counsels. The result of the deliberations was the issue of a warrant for the arrest of Doctor Warbrick. Gilmartin—diffidently because of his lack of *locus standi*—counselled against this course, reminding the others that there were too many questions left unexplained, such as, for example, the anonymous letters, but he was overborne. It was also decided that Doctor Marsden should be brought up again before the magistrate and that no evidence be advanced against him, in order that his release be secured. Here, also, to Meldrum's surprise, Gilmartin was the sole person present who argued against this procedure, but in vain.

The Irishman left Scotland Yard alone and immediately took a taxi to Warbrick's house, where he again interviewed the servant. The exchange of a crisp piece of paper obtained from her the information he required, and that evening found him seated in an express train which left Paddington station for the Devon and Cornish Riviera.

That same evening a search-warrant was executed

at Doctor Warbrick's house. Certain bottles and slides were taken away—nothing else. Late that night a report was handed in to the Assistant Commissioner which stated that one of the receptacles—an ordinary four-ounce medicine bottle—contained an artificial culture of *live pneumococci*.

CHAPTER XXIV

“ PARSON BILL ” DISCOURSES

HAVING, against Gilmartin's advice, insisted on Marsden's release, Superintendent Meldrum was none the less determined to bear in mind the possibility that he might have to revise his ideas yet again. He was not satisfied on many points. An expert examination of the Blick typewriter had confirmed his own opinion that the anonymous letter to Marsden had been typed with it, but he was compelled to admit to himself that any one of several persons could have used the instrument for the purpose. Marsden himself, he thought, might have done so in order to divert suspicion from himself; Mrs. Marsden had doubtless had an opportunity to use it while it was in her house, and with regard to her the superintendent could not make up his mind. He had questioned Doctor Burton about the possibility of a complete change in her outlook on life having resulted from a revived hope in her own recovery. The Oxford man was emphatic in his asseveration not only of the possibility but of the likelihood amounting to certainty of such a complete transformation. Meldrum, however, had no great opinion of women in general, regarding nine out of ten of them as good actresses before all else.

With regard to Joan Cresswell he could not conceive any motive for her sending such a letter, unless—he thought with the cynicism which is liable at times to become part and parcel of the

detective's make-up—the whole story of her love for young Corbell-Manners was, on her part at any rate, a blind to cover another illicit affection. Somehow, nevertheless, he felt that such an idea did not fit in with the girl's character nor with her actions in other respects. Even if it were true, he considered again, it was difficult to see what Joan Cresswell would gain. The girl Doris Farquhar seemed to him a more probable culprit, and yet . . . Meldrum shook his head over it all. Suppose any one of these four people *had* written the anonymous letter addressed to Doctor Marsden, did it follow from that that he or she wrote the letters to Barshott and to Scotland Yard? If so, why? Then, again, did it follow from the fact that a certain X had written one or all of the anonymous letters that he or she was guilty of having caused Marsden to administer the live organisms of disease to his patients?

“Gosh! It is a muddle!” Meldrum said to himself. “Perhaps Larry was right, and that I shouldn't have been in such a hurry about that warrant.”

He pursed his lips.

“Hang it!” his thoughts went on. “Warbrick is the fellow we want. What was he doing in Marsden's surgery? Why did he hang about till the dispenser chap went away? To plant something there, I'll lay a hundred to one. Funny thing, though, about Peters! Why didn't he knock him out for good? A little thing like that shouldn't worry him. And why did he not leave him to be picked up by somebody else? I'm jiggered if I can see a light anywhere.”

After a few minutes he called a name on the house telephone.

“Has Inspector Pierce gone?” he asked.

“Yes, sir,” was the reply; “he took the Torbay Express this morning.”

Meldrum hung up and looked at his watch.

"He is somewhere about Reading by now," he muttered.

He sat back in his chair and stared at the ceiling for five minutes. Then he jumped up and took his hat from the peg inside the door. Within two minutes he was on his way to Gilmartin's hotel in Earl's Court.

"Sorry, sir," the reception clerk told him there, "but Mr. Gilmartin has left."

"Left?" Meldrum exclaimed. "Hasn't he kept on his room?"

"No, sir."

"Do you know where he has gone?"

"No, sir."

It was obvious that the staff of this hotel would give as little information as possible about their residents—certain residents especially. Meldrum remembered that Gilmartin "had a way with him"—and a nasty way it was with those who talked too much. He took his warrant-card from his pocket and pushed it across the counter.

"That will show you," he said to the clerk, "that I am not asking questions out of mere curiosity. I will repeat my last question: Do you know where Mr. Gilmartin has gone?"

The clerk looked at the card, smiled and pushed it back to the superintendent.

"As you are Superintendent Meldrum," she said, "I will give you a message that Mr. Gilmartin left for me before he went away. I was not here when he went, so he wrote it. Here it is."

Meldrum took the scrap of paper the girl handed to him.

Dear Miss Murray [he read], if anybody asks about me, you know nothing. If a heavy lump called Superintendent Meldrum actually gives you the third degree—he is quite capable of it—tell him

that I have gone to pick his chestnuts out of the fire. If he wants to know more than that, just put out your little tongue at him and say, “Sucks to you!” He understands baby language.

Yours. L. Gilmartin.

The big superintendent looked at the girl behind the reception-desk. She grinned back at him.

“It has always been a mystery to me,” Meldrum rumbled, “how all the nice girls in the country fall for that big Irishman.”

“It’s because he is such a nice man,” the clerk replied saucily, “and there are so many of the other sort.”

“And I’m one of them, eh?”

She considered him for a moment.

“Well, no,” she said with mock seriousness, “I think you’re not so bad really.”

“Now, look here, young lady,” Meldrum said in as good an imitation of her tone as he could manage, “I think you know more of my friend Gilmartin’s movements than you are willing to say. I shall have to take severe measures if you——”

“Oh, sir! I am a poor hard-working girl,” the clerk interrupted with a stifled laugh. “Please don’t do anything to me. Now, if you tried somebody as big as yourself. There is a porter here who calls taxis for people.”

“Thank you,” Meldrum said with heavy sarcasm; “you are very kind.”

He saw the porter, who under slight pressure remembered that Gilmartin had directed his driver of the evening before to take him to Paddington.

“Well, my lad,” the superintendent ordered, “just you call a taxi and tell him to drive *me* to Paddington.”

On his way Meldrum laughed to himself.

“The old fox!” he muttered. “The wily old

ruffian! What the dickens has he got up his sleeve? ”

At Paddington he wasted no time, for he asked to see the stationmaster. As a result of his talk with that official the following telegram was dispatched along the route taken by the Torbay Express, addressed to the Guard.

Communicate Detective Inspector Pierce passenger your train Message begins Do not execute warrant before seeing Gilmartin somewhere your destination Meldrum Message ends Stationmaster Paddington.

Meldrum then left the Great Western Terminus and strolled away leisurely. He had not gone far when a voice reached his ear—the unctuous voice of one who loves to hear himself speak:

“ Good morning, Mr. Meldrum; I hope I see you in perfect health.”

The superintendent looked round and saw an elderly man of patriarchal appearance and childlike smile. He smiled in return.

“ Well, if it isn’t Parson Bill!” he exclaimed. “ How are you, Bill? I haven’t seen you for a long time.”

Bill turned and walked along with the superintendent.

“ Oh, not so bad, Mr. Meldrum, not so bad! And what might you be doing round this part of the world? Or is that an indiscreet question? ”

“ Very indiscreet, Bill, very indiscreet,” Meldrum laughed, giving a fair imitation of the old ex-convict’s fruity voice and impressive manner. “ But as a matter of fact I can answer it. I was just at a

loose end, and was walking along thinking out a knotty problem.”

“ Ah ! ” Parson Bill exclaimed. “ So that’s it, is it ? I was wondering. I says to myself : There’s my old friend Mr. Meldrum walking along on the other side of the road thinking how he can spread the net that will catch the bad ones of this wicked world—but why is he doing it outside his own manor, I says.”

“ It’s not a question of spreading the net, Bill,” Meldrum replied good-humouredly. “ It’s a question of distinguishing between the different kinds of fish already in it.”

Bill made a sympathetic noise and then lowered his voice.

“ I am glad to see, Mr. Meldrum,” he said, “ that you have seen your way to drop the case against Doctor Marsden.”

“ Hello ! ” the superintendent exclaimed. “ What is *your* interest in Doctor Marsden ? ”

“ Oh, merely second-hand, so to speak, merely second-hand. My respected landlady, Ma Slater, employs him as her medical attendant, and having been ill of late she has missed his—er—ministrations, though as a substitute a certain Doctor Burton seems very efficient.”

“ Bill, your command of the English language is marvellously efficient,” Meldrum commented.

“ I have had, thanks to you, sir, and to other equally efficient members of your profession, plenty of spare time for study,” Bill replied promptly.

“ But to return to Doctor Marsden,” he went on, “ I do not know the gentleman, but all my friends

say that he is incapable of doing the things of which you have accused him. I—er—gather that the general consensus of opinion is that if he ever poisoned anybody his victim deserved it richly.”

“I see. That is a very valuable expression of opinion, I am sure,” Meldrum replied. “I will certainly note it; but the victim was a reputable journalist, and the almost-victims were another journalist, and a Catholic priest—none of them, I venture to say, Bill, deserving of—er—poisoning.”

“Did you say a Catholic priest?” Bill asked, forgetting his would-be parsonical accent.

“I did, Bill. I said a Catholic priest—a certain Father Austin.”

“Who is my very good friend,” Bill completed, “introduced to me by another very good friend who was once a colleague of yours. I refer, of course, to Mr. Gilmartin.”

“Have you seen him lately? Gilmartin, I mean,”

“Oh, yes. As I said, he—er—introduced me to the very estimable gentleman who is Father Austin, who in turn was most amiable.”

“Yes,” Meldrum said. “Father Austin is the genuine article, Bill—not like some others I could mention who have worn clerical clothes to which they were not entitled.”

Bill looked reproachfully at the superintendent.

“Now that is not like you, Mr. Meldrum,” he said, “to throw up at me the misdemeanours for which I have paid. I have thrown off my clerical disguise and with it——”

“Not your parson’s talk anyway,” Meldrum interrupted. “However, let that pass. We were

talking about Doctor Marsden. You were saying that anybody who was his victim richly deserved it. Now, Father Austin didn't deserve it and——”

“Ergo,” Bill broke in, “ergo—you know the word, Mr. Meldrum? It means ‘therefore’—ergo, I say, Doctor Marsden neither poisoned him nor tried to do so.”

“You with your ‘ergos’ !” Meldrum laughed. “But by the way, how did you find out that Marsden had been released? It isn't in the papers yet.”

“No, but Doctor Marsden is making his rounds as usual. You should see how they received him round about Audrey Street.”

“Oh, he is popular.”

“Yes, but I wouldn't give much for the other bloke's chances if they find him. They've already broken his windows.”

“Who?”

“Warbrick, of course. The rumour has got round that it is he who is the poisoner and——”

Meldrum quickened his pace.

“Now, how did that rumour get around, I wonder,” he said.

“I'm afraid I may be in some way responsible,” Bill replied.

“Why you?”

“Entirely innocently, Mr. Meldrum. I just happened to mention to one or two people that in the old days—the bad old days, Mr. Meldrum—at the Scrubs, we used to call him Poisoner Warbrick!”

Before Meldrum could open his mouth Bill had stopped and was staring up the street.

“Look who’s there!” he exclaimed. “The dirty dog! I promised I’d—— ’Bye, Mr. Meldrum; see you later!”

Bill shot into a side-street in obvious pursuit of an individual whose face was just then hidden, and who clearly was anxious to avoid an encounter with Parson Bill.

Meldrum stood stock-still.

“Good Lord!” he exclaimed. “Wormwood Scrubs! Poisoner Warbrick! Of course! What a fool I am!”

He beckoned a passing taxi.

“Scotland Yard!” he said, and was driven off.

CHAPTER XXV

“ I SUSPECT MY WIFE ! ”

FATHER AUSTIN in his turn was not feeling very happy. He could not forget that he had been a party to the trapping of Marsden, and now, convinced from what he had heard that the doctor had been no more than the victim of diabolical machinations, he was wondering what would be Marsden's attitude towards himself. Not that he cared much what this would be except in so far as it affected the good work which each of them in conjunction with the other had been able to do in the poorer parts of the parish. The priest was sitting in his presbytery on the evening of Marsden's release thinking over these things when the front-door bell announced a caller. Father Austin, as was usual with him on hearing the sound at that hour of the day, began at once his preparations for a sick call. He was therefore astonished to see ushered in the man of whom he was thinking—Doctor Marsden.

“ Good evening, Father Austin,” the doctor greeted him with a smile as he strode forward into the room with a younger and more elastic step than Father Austin had seen him use for many a day; “ I hope I haven't disturbed you.”

“ Not a bit ! Not a bit ! ” the priest answered, slightly nervous and embarrassed in spite of himself. “ I am delighted to see you again. And—er—I'd like to apologise for my part in——”

“ Good heavens, Father, you have nothing to

apologise for—nothing whatever!” Marsden stopped him. “On the contrary thanks to you the terrible conspiracy against me was discovered, though”—this with a smile—“I will admit that I have not been precisely comfortable these last few days. However, that’s all over and done with. I’m free now, and that’s that!”

“I am very glad you take it like this,” Father Austin declared. “I wonder if I should take it so well or have been so charitable.”

“I’m sure you would,” Marsden declared, and took the seat pulled forward for him by the priest.

“You spoke of a conspiracy against you,” Father Austin said when they were both comfortably installed. “Do you mean that word literally?”

“Er—well,” Marsden replied, “I didn’t exactly weigh the meaning of the word, but I think that it is—yes, I believe it should be taken literally—a plotting or scheming together. I don’t see what else it can have been.”

“Why do you think that?”

“I have no really good answer to that,” the doctor said after a pause, “except this: I cannot imagine any person of my acquaintance—that is to say, among those who have been near me for months past—who would have had the means of obtaining those live pneumococci, and I know nobody with the means of procuring them who could possibly have had access to my bottles. My conclusion, therefore, is that more than one person was concerned.”

This was a new idea to Father Austin. He found, however, one objection.

“What about your bag?” he asked. “Don’t you ever leave it in the car?”

“I have been asked that question before,” was the reply, “and I can only say that hardly ever. When I go to a patient’s house, I take it in with

me. If I am not going to a case I don't take the bag with me in the car. In that case poisons, serums and the like are locked up in my home.”

“Suppose you stop on your way to or from a case,” Father Austin countered, “at a shop, for example, or something like that. What do you do then?”

“I suppose I sometimes leave it in the car then, but I have been thinking that over and I don't believe that anything could be done to it even then. You see, Father Austin, you must put yourself in the shoes of a man who wants to put a phial of live organisms in place of one of phials of serum. The first thing he requires to know is what serum I have with me in order to plant an identically labelled one on me. Next, he must watch for an opportunity of planting it. Now, if I had regular stopping-places and times, that would be easy, but I haven't. Besides, if his object is to kill one of my patients he would need to know exactly when I am going to see that patient, and whether I am going to use a serum or not. He must, in order to avoid killing somebody else——”

“The theory, I believe, is,” Father Austin interrupted, “that he—or she—actually *did* mean to kill somebody other than the person who was killed.”

“Yes?”

The priest nodded.

“H'm,” the doctor went on thoughtfully.

“That implies knowledge—or partial knowledge at least, of my movements.”

“Precisely,” Father Austin replied. “It seems therefore that the guilty person is either somebody who has access to your case-book—or diary, or whatever you call the book in which you note down the calls you are going to make on any particular day—or somebody to whom you may have casually mentioned where you were going.”

"That seems reasonable," Marsden agreed, "unless we take it for granted that the culprit is somebody who has such a grudge against me that he didn't care if he killed all my patients provided he got me into trouble."

"Can you imagine anybody who might have such a grudge?" the priest asked.

"Frankly, I can't," was the immediate reply. "I am one of these fortunate—or perhaps colourless—people who never seem to make violent enemies."

"What about your colleague, Warbrick?"

"I really don't know," the doctor answered, "how such an idea ever got round. Warbrick is undoubtedly a curious bird, an eccentric, but when we meet, as we do now and then in the course of our rounds, he never shows any signs of enmity. True, he disagrees profoundly with all my ideas, practically without exception, especially on the question of autogenous vaccines and serums. He has always been able to argue the point with me in his rather blustery and—in more ways than one—intemperate manner, but he has never been offensive. In fact, I believe from the little I have seen of him that Warbrick, for all his eccentricities, is a very kind-hearted man."

"H'm!" the priest said, shaking his head. "That may be, but I have heard curious things from some of my people about his methods of obtaining patients. He doesn't seem to be above accusing you of poisoning yours."

"I don't think he does quite that, Marsden replied. "I expect that there's a good deal of misinterpretation of what he really does say."

He put his hand in his breast-pocket and drew out an envelope.

"Look!" he said. "Here is a letter my wife received from him on the day after I was arrested. At least, it was posted on that day."

Father Austin took the letter and read:

Dear Mrs. Marsden,

Will you please accept my sympathy in the great trouble which has befallen you. It may perhaps comfort you a little when I say that neither I nor anybody who has had any contact with your husband could think him for one moment capable of committing the crimes alleged against him.

If I can be of any service whatever to you, pray command.

*Yours sincerely,
Cedric Warbrick.*

“Why on earth,” the priest asked, “didn’t Mrs. Marsden show this to the police?”

“My dear Father Austin,” Marsden replied, “for the best of reasons: she had never read it. She was in such a state that she did not open a single letter. In fact, I spent part of to-day helping her with her neglected correspondence.”

“I see,” Father Austin said. “It certainly doesn’t read like the Warbrick we hear so much about.”

“Certainly not like an enemy of mine,” Marsden added.

“Nor is it the letter of a guilty man,” the priest supplemented.

“No.”

“Then I’m afraid,” Father Austin said, “we must fall back on some hidden enemy in your immediate circle of friends.”

“Not necessarily,” Marsden disagreed, “not necessarily my enemy, but an enemy of one of my patients—somebody in fact who thought they had found a safe and undiscoverable means of getting rid of one of them.”

“Which one of them?”

“Heaven knows!”

"Well," said Father Austin, "all that doesn't square very well with your original idea of a conspiracy against you."

The doctor sighed wearily.

"I wish I knew what to think," he said. "My mind keeps jumping from one idea to another, and—oh, the whole thing is a nightmare!"

Father Austin looked at the doctor, now sitting bowed with his elbows on his knees, with none of the cheerfulness with which he had entered only a few minutes before.

"Look here, Doctor Marsden," he said then, "something is still worrying you. We are here as if it were my confessional; if you think it would be of any help to you to get things off your chest, do so with the absolute certainty that I will regard it as said in utter confidence."

"Whatever it is?"

The priest paused. Could he go so far as that? He has certain duties and responsibilities both as a citizen and as a priest. How would such an undertaking square with these? He decided quickly.

"Yes," he replied, "whatever it is!"

Marsden's face now bore an anguished expression. He was silent for a full minute.

"Well," he said, his throat dry with the emotion which filled him, "I have been trying to persuade myself into the belief in a conspiracy against me; into the belief that perhaps the makers of the serum did make a mistake and would not admit it; into every belief except the one which haunts me day and night, for, God forgive me, Father, I suspect my wife!"

"God forgive me?" Father Austin thought, moved more than he allowed to appear. "Then he does believe in Him!"

Aloud he said without any expression:

"Why?"

“Because I believe she hated young Corbell-Manners to such an extent at the time that she was insane on the point. She was undoubtedly capable of killing him then. It is quite possible that since the improvement young Burton has made in her she has forgotten all about it, but I seem to remember saying to Joan Cresswell one day in her presence that I thought of giving the young chap an injection of something or other. At about the same time I was attending Murdoch, so, you see——”

He stopped, unable to say any more. Father Austin stood up and put his hand on the doctor's bowed shoulder.

“I believe you to be entirely wrong,” he said.

Marsden made a movement which the priest interpreted correctly.

“No,” he went on, “I am not saying that merely in order to set your mind at rest. Now, just answer two or three questions. First of all: Has Mrs. Marsden ever shown the slightest interest in the contents of your medicine and poison cupboards?”

“No, but——”

“All right. Has Mrs. Marsden any means whatever of getting hold of a culture of live organisms?”

“I—don't—think—so,” was the slow reply, “but——”

“Another but,” the priest interrupted, laughing. “Now another one: Would Mrs. Marsden know the difference between a live pneumococcus and a dead dog? You needn't answer that one. I know the answer and there is no ‘but’ either. I do, however, want an answer to this one: Has Mrs. Marsden ever taken any noticeable interest in your campaign in favour of what you call euthanasia?”

“No, but she has always known my opinions,

and she has asked me to kill her and put her out of her suffering and misery."

"I see. Now here is one that will stump you! Who wrote the anonymous letters? Ah, you can't answer. Well, I will tell you. The murderer! That's who wrote them, every one of them! I have seen them all, and as one of my parishioners says, 'I'll take my davy' that not only did Mrs. Marsden not write them, but *no woman ever wrote them!*'"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE LABEL

FATHER AUSTIN and Marsden continued to talk and speculate on the question of the anonymous letters, but it seemed to the former that the doctor still had something on his mind, and was looking for an opening to speak of it. While he was wondering how he could help, the telephone bell in the hall interrupted the conversation. Father Austin went to take the call and heard the voice of Superintendent Meldrum:

"I believe Doctor Marsden is with you, Father Austin."

"Yes, he is still here. Do you want to speak to him?"

"No, just ask him not to go yet," was the reply; "I'd like to come round and have a word with him if I may."

"Come along here by all means," Father Austin invited. "I will give your message in the meantime."

He did so and Marsden expressed his willingness to remain.

"I wonder what he wants now," the doctor said—a trifle uneasily, Father Austin thought.

"That's rather a useless occupation," the priest laughed—"considering that he will be here in a few minutes."

"He's not a bad fellow—Meldrum," Marsden remarked. "I must say I found him very decent during my—er—stay as a Government guest."

"Gilmartin speaks very well of him," Father Austin replied, "and that, to me at any rate, is a passport. I don't believe he would do a dirty trick. All the old lags in this neighbourhood also have a good word for him as well—and that is something of a recommendation too."

Their talk whilst awaiting Meldrum took a desultory turn. It was obvious that both were thinking of the superintendent's impending visit and speculating on the reason for it. They were not left long in suspense, for within a very few minutes they heard the sound of a car being pulled up outside. Father Austin himself went to the door and admitted the visitor.

When Meldrum had been settled comfortably in an armchair he addressed the doctor. Father Austin would have left the room, but neither of the others would allow it.

"I have come, Doctor," the superintendent said, "to get your permission to make a thorough search of your surgery premises in Audrey Street."

"What on earth for?" Marsden asked. "Haven't you finished with me even yet?"

"I don't know myself," Meldrum answered, "what I want to search for. You see, Doctor, we have information that Doctor Warbrick lately made an illegal entry into your premises. Now, an illegal entry means in this case one of two things: either he went there to look for something that he thought was there, or he went there to plant something there that was not there before. I have been playing with the idea that he went there to plant something, though there is also a certain amount of plausibility in the idea that he was looking for something. Now, if he planted something we want to know what it was; if, on the other hand, he was looking for something,

what was that something? Something to incriminate you? Perhaps. Or something which he had previously planted there and which if found now would incriminate himself? Possibly. Anyhow, I'd like to make a thorough search of your premises in your presence. What about it, Doctor?"

"I have not the slightest objection," Marsden replied. "When do you want to make the search?"

"The sooner the better," the superintendent said, "and if you could be present also, Father Austin, I should be glad."

Father Austin nodded.

"I don't mind being present," he said.

"Thank you. Now if you gentlemen are ready, I am. I have a police car outside and I can run you round to Audrey Street in two shakes."

If it was not precisely in "two shakes" it was at any rate in a very short time that they were entering Marsden's surgery in Audrey Street. As they came into the hall, Carpenter the dispenser peered out from the door of a room on the left.

"It's all right, Carpenter," Marsden reassured him; "I am here."

Meldrum, who was accompanied by another plain-clothes man, then spoke.

"What I'd like, is," he said, "that all of you, including Carpenter accompany us from room to room and watch the search closely."

"Search?" the dispenser asked. "Why?"

"Never you mind why, my lad," Meldrum said in his best "move-along-there" tone, "and do as you're told."

Neither the doctor nor the priest had ever seen a search so painstaking as that one was. The two detectives moved and searched literally everything. The plain-clothes man who had accompanied the superintendent was obviously a practised hand at

the work. They did not confine themselves to the doctor's waiting and consulting-rooms with which they started, but went on also to the dispensing-room, searching thoroughly every corner of this, opening every partly filled bottle and jar and peering closely at those which still bore the manufacturer's seal. Now and again they referred to the doctor, or the dispenser, or to both, for identification of some unlabelled container.

A row of neatly arranged and labelled wide-mouthed jars on one shelf seemed to have a great attraction for Meldrum. The names on the labels were those of some of the most commonly used salts in the British Pharmacopoeia. The superintendent first of all looked at them as a whole, then turned to Doctor Marsden with an interrogative tilt of his eyebrow.

"What?" Marsden asked. "Something you can't understand about these?"

"Well," Meldrum replied, "they look so new and neat. Don't remember seeing them when we were here last."

The doctor laughed.

"No, they are a recent acquisition," he said. "Carpenter pestered me until I got him these jars. He has a perfect mania for neatness in his dispensary. In fact, he would like to have every corner of it like that one, neatly ticketed and symmetrically arranged, but I tell him that a G.P.'s practice won't stand the same calls on its purse as an endowed chemical laboratory or research department of a big firm. That's why you have that nice little corner in this wilderness—a first instalment."

"I see," Meldrum answered, and with a look at

the embarrassed dispenser he returned to the shelf.

He read each label in turn, then opened the jar to which it referred, sometimes tasted the contents with the tip of his tongue, and then replaced the stopper. He was so long at this that Father Austin left the stool where he had installed himself and came over to look also. Meldrum turned his look from the shelf to the priest's face. Father Austin walked along the side of the shelf as the superintendent had done, translating half aloud into English the Latin names of the contents of the jars as indicated by the labels:

“ Bicarbonate of Soda—Epsom Salts—Glauber Salts—Sulphate of—Oh! ”

Meldrum suddenly caught the priest by the arm and said almost in a whisper:

“ I think you've seen enough of that, Father.”

The superintendent then continued his investigation of the other shelves.

They finished their work in the dispensary and went from it to the room where Peters had heard Doctor Warbrick on the night he had received his injury. This proved to be a roomy kitchen with a scullery leading off it. The priest, the doctor and the dispenser followed the detectives as they examined the place thoroughly. Obviously Carpenter used many laboratory utensils as containers for culinary products. It was equally clear that the dispenser did his own cooking, leaving the dirty vessels in the sink to be washed by the woman who came daily to do the cleaning of the place. The detectives were as conscientious here as they had been in the other rooms. Every cupboard was opened, every container investigated, even

pans of dripping and cans of food were carefully scrutinised. All this was done in silence. At last here too the job was finished. Meldrum turned to the dispenser.

"You sleep here, Carpenter, don't you?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," the dispenser replied.

"You have no objection to having your room examined?"

"Not a bit, sir."

"You can refuse, you know," Meldrum told him.

"I don't want to refuse," the weedy little man replied; "I have nothing there that I don't want you to see."

"Oh, I am sure of that," the superintendent said, "but you see, something may have been planted there by somebody else."

"Oh!" This thought seemed to breed fear more than anything else had done. "But how will you know whether it was planted—or—or was my own?"

Meldrum smiled.

"I shouldn't worry too much about that, Carpenter," he said. "As we have come here to look for something that has been planted, you can count on us knowing what to think if we find it."

"As long as you don't think I have done anything," the dispenser interrupted, "you can turn my room inside out."

Meldrum took this for permission, and they entered the little bedroom next door to the kitchen. The embarrassed Carpenter began to make apologies for its untidiness, and they were certainly apt,

for it seemed that his mania for neatness was not carried to the extent of arranging his personal effects in any sort of order. A pair of trousers hung across the back of a chair. The bed itself was rumpled and unmade. There was dirty water in the hand-basin. On the top of a chest of drawers which evidently served as a dressing-table there lay a miscellaneous assortment of buttons, mostly of the "bachelor" variety, collar-studs, used razor-blades, shaving-soap and soiled collars. The detectives paid no attention to this, but began methodically to gut the room, even to the extent of examining the papers in the drawer of a deal table which was used as a writing-desk. This part of the work fell to Meldrum, who made no scruple in reading the papers he found there. The little dispenser looked anxiously and uncomfortably on, and Doctor Marsden, eyeing his employee, thought the anxiety excessive, especially at one moment when the superintendent picked up one particular sheet of paper. The doctor then looked at the superintendent and saw that he was smiling broadly. Meldrum looked up, caught the doctor's eye fixed upon him and smiled still more broadly. Then he went on reading. The dispenser, ordinarily pale and sickly-looking, was now red of face and wriggling with discomfort. At last he could no longer restrain himself.

"Please, sir," he said to Meldrum, "Please! Don't read that! It's very private!"

"Private?" Meldrum exclaimed. "I should have thought that you'd have had this published! It's not bad stuff, though a bit—er—sentimental."

"Oh, no, sir," Carpenter said. "I couldn't publish it. It's too—too——"

"Oh, I see, I see," Meldrum interrupted, and turned to Marsden.

"You didn't know your dispenser was a poet?" he said. "These are not bad verses. However—I'd better be getting on with this search!"

"I think we've finished, sir," the other detective said. "There's nothing here."

"What about upstairs?" Meldrum asked.

"That is a private flat," Marsden explained.

"The entrance is the door you may have noticed on the right as you came in."

"Then there is no connection between the two floors?"

"No, that was cut off before I took the place. Indeed, I don't know the name of the people who live up there."

"I see. Well, we'd better be moving, I think, I won't disturb your room any more to-night, Carpenter. Would you two gentlemen like to come along to the Yard? I have something to show you that might interest you."

The last sentences were addressed to Marsden and Father Austin. Both signified their willingness and they were driven off to Police Headquarters. Meldrum escorted his visitors to his room and then went to a cupboard. From this he took out a small bottle.

"This," he said, "was found in Doctor Warbrick's house. It was examined and it is found to contain live pneumococci—an artificial culture of them."

The two men said nothing, but Father Austin seemed troubled. Meldrum threw him a warning look.

"That is one point," the superintendent continued. "You will notice that the bottle is labelled merely POISON."

They nodded.

"Well," Meldrum went on, "our experts say that those block letters were written by the same hand as that which wrote the anonymous letters!"

The priest stared at the superintendent, who stared blankly back. Marsden said nothing, but looked from the bottle to Meldrum's face, and then at the priest.

"What do you deduce from all that?" Father Austin asked.

"Nothing," Meldrum replied. "Just nothing—yet!"

CHAPTER XXVII

RECANTATION

As the doctor and Father Austin were being escorted by Meldrum down to the exit under the archway at Scotland Yard, the superintendent managed to whisper into the priest's ear:

"Keep your tongue between your teeth, Father, please, for the present."

Father Austin nodded.

On the way back in a taxi the priest was silent. After a few remarks which the doctor made had received only monosyllabic replies, Marsden also said no more until he was about to drop Father Austin at his presbytery door before continuing in the same vehicle to his own home.

"I really can't believe it of Warbrick," he said then, "in spite of that label."

"Neither can I," the priest replied briefly.

"May I come round again to see you in the morning, Father Austin?" the doctor then ventured with some diffidence. "I want to ask your advice on a rather important matter."

"Certainly. Do come!" Father Austin invited cordially. "I shall always be glad to see you. What time will suit you?"

"Any time really," the doctor replied, "though as a matter of fact I had intended to put this thing before you to-night, but our talk on other matters and the arrival of the superintendent rather upset things."

"Yes, they did do that," Father Austin said, and looked at his watch. "Well, look here, why not come in now and let's finish it. I am not a bit sleepy and if you——"

"You really don't mind?" the doctor broke in eagerly. "Then I'll pay off the taxi. There's something I wish to get off my chest."

Arrived at the presbytery door Marsden paid the taxi-driver and followed the priest into the latter's sitting-room. There he took possession of the armchair he had occupied a short time before and waited till Father Austin had also settled himself in his previous seat.

"It is about this euthanasia campaign, Father," Marsden opened then. "You know, of course, that I have been one of the most vigorous protagonists of the idea—at least among members of my profession?"

Father Austin smiled.

"Yes," he said, "that is practically common knowledge. I hope you are not going to open up a discussion on it, for if you do I shall have to—as Brer Rabbit would say—knock the natal stuffin' out of you—metaphorically."

"The natal stuffin' has already been knocked out of me," Marsden replied, "so you won't have the chance, however richly you deserve the pleasure."

"You mean?"

"I mean that I no longer believe in euthanasia as a—shall we say?—as a policy."

"Well, that's good hearing anyway," Father Austin declared heartily. "I never did think that it squared very well with your own actions."

"No, I suppose it didn't," Marsden agreed. "Man is a funny sort of animal."

"Very!" was the priest's dry response. "So funny that God actually gave him an immortal

soul—and with all due reverence, that made him funnier still! ”

“ An immortal soul, eh? ” the doctor echoed in a tone which, while questioning, was not entirely one of incredulity. Then he was silent for a minute.

“ Do you know, Father Austin,” he resumed then, “ that until very recently—in fact until I read your letter in the *Epoch*—I had never given this immortality idea two thoughts. I dare say that shocks you.”

“ It would take a good deal more than that to shock me—or any other priest of any experience,” Father Austin replied. “ *J'en ai vu bien d'autres!* There are, I'm afraid, a good many like you.”

“ Yes, no doubt,” Marsden agreed, “ and that is because so many were brought up as I was. You see, Father, I am the son of a doctor. My father was a G.P. too, who lost his own health and spent his own life in trying for very little reward to keep other people alive and healthy. What his religious beliefs were I have not the faintest idea. I only know that he never went to any church or chapel. I saw very little of him as a child, and, my mother having died when I was very young, I was brought up by an old maiden aunt of—well, she called it evangelical views.”

“ I know the sort,” Father Austin said.

“ Now, I didn't know then,” the doctor went on, “ what I found out later, that ‘ evangelical ’ means ‘ relating to or according to the Gospel ’. How could I know that? I was never given the New Testament to read. People of our class didn't send

their children to Sunday-school, so I never heard anything of what was taught there, but every Sunday morning I was hauled off by my aunt to an interminable service called Mattins of which I didn't understand a word, and every Sunday afternoon I was set the task of learning chunks of the Old Testament by heart. I can still quote—listen!

My son, keep my words, and lay up my commandments with thee.

Keep my commandments and live; and my law as the apple of thine eye.

Bind them upon thy fingers, write them upon the table of thine heart.

Say unto wisdom, Thou art my sister; and call understanding thy kinswoman.

“There are lots of passages like that,” Marsden went on, “which have stuck in my memory, merely because when as a lonely little devil in a cold mid-Victorian house I was learning them, the rhythm of the words attracted me though I didn't understand a line of them. How, for instance, the law could be the apple of my eye I couldn't make out, and—what sort of an apple was that anyhow? I remember looking at my small chilblained fingers and wondering how I could bind commandments on them, and when I asked my aunt how my heart had a table, I was told that I was lacking in reverence towards the Holy Word. I hope, by the way, that *you* don't think me irreverent now, Father Austin.”

“No. I am interested,” the priest said. “Go on.”

"Well, as you see," Marsden continued, "that was the sum total of my religious training. Most of the New Testament I read only afterwards in 'cribs', when I had to construe parts of it from the Greek. You can imagine, then, that when I found myself emancipated from my aunt, I promptly abandoned all thought of religion or religious practices. The best man I knew, my father, did not go to church. Neither would I. Do you blame me?"

"Far be it from me to do that," the priest said. "The religion of your childhood was certainly not a cheerful one."

"Cheerful?" the doctor laughed. "Ye Gods, No! It is the most dismal memory of my life. However, all that is beside the point."

"Is it?" the priest thought; but he said nothing, lest the conversation take a different turning from that originally intended.

"The point really is," Marsden was saying, "that the question of the immortal soul never bothered me one way or the other. The *sanctity* of human life was an idea that never penetrated my consciousness at all, at least, in any special way—no more than the sanctity of private property, say. When I began to study medicine I thought the idea of people keeping in health a good and meritorious one, but that was all. Later, when in practice I saw much suffering from incurable disease, it struck me that such suffering was not only pitiable but useless, and not to be borne so long as there was a remedy at hand in the shape of painless death. The ethics of the profession and the law of the land, however, forbade the logical conclusion from

being put into practice, hence my attitude in this controversy on which you were on the other side. But now . . .”

He stopped, looking into space.

“Yes?” Father Austin prompted. “Now?”

“Now,” the doctor said slowly at first, “I—know—that—I—was—a—damned fool! An arrogant damned fool! Who am I to say that a disease cannot be cured? Who am I to—oh, Father Austin, to think that for all these years my poor wife has been suffering agonies that made her ask for death because I and other damned fools like myself did not even know what she was suffering from!”

Father Austin said nothing. A tear was suspiciously near his eye in sympathy with the pain he heard in the doctor’s voice. Marsden’s eyes were swimming and his voice then broke as he uttered a laugh which was more like a cackle.

“And,” he went on, “a young chap, brought here by—by what?”

“By Divine Providence,” Father Austin murmured.

“By a tragedy which nearly swallowed me up,” the doctor went on. “A young chap, I say, who knows his job comes along and calmly puts my wife on her feet and invites her to dance with him in a month! It’s—it’s—dammit, man, I’ve wanted to dance with her all these years myself!”

Marsden broke down unashamedly. Tears rolled down his cheeks and sobs broke from him.

Father Austin rose and went to a modest cupboard. There he mixed a drink and silently put it into Marsden's hand. The doctor looked at it for a second as if he did not know what it was there for—then gulped it down in large greedy gulps.

"Ah!" he said then in a voice which was still shaky. "That did me good! Thanks, Father."

Father Austin wondered whether his companion was referring to the drink or to—something else.

Marsden was now wiping his eyes in the awkward way of men which has none of the elegance of the feminine performance of the same action.

"Sorry," he said then. "My nerves have been on edge for some time."

"Well," Father Austin said, and laughed at the same time, "I am no doctor, but I think this has done them good."

"It has," was the emphatic reply, as Marsden crammed his handkerchief back into his pocket, "and now it's nearly time I asked you for the advice I've kept you out of bed for."

"Don't hurry yourself. I told you I wasn't sleepy."

"Thanks. It won't take long now," Marsden replied. "It is this; I think that as I have been associated rather publicly with this euthanasia business it is only right that I should publicly retract now that I no longer believe in it."

"That is very decent of you," Father Austin said.

"No, it is merely honest," the doctor replied.

"My only difficulty is how to do it. That's where I want your advice."

"I should say that a letter to the *Epoch* would be sufficient," the priest advised.

"Do you think so? You see, there's the matter of my arrest and all that. Would they——"

"The *Epoch* did not connect your arrest with the euthanasia campaign as other papers did. In fact, I happen to know that the editor never believed that you killed Murdoch."

"Unfortunately," Marsden said slowly, "it would seem that I did."

"Let God judge the merits of that," the priest answered. "I know that the guilty will be punished in His time. But look here. My advice is that you concoct a letter to the editor of the *Epoch* telling him of your change of belief and the reason for it, which, I gather, is mainly the fallibility of diagnosticians. I'd like to see another reason as well, but perhaps that will come."

Marsden said nothing for a few moments.

"Thanks very much, Father Austin; you've been very good and indulgent with me," he said. "It is very late and I must really go. I will write that letter to the *Epoch* and I think that its form and matter will please you. And—er—I'd like to come over soon and have a talk about this immortal soul business."

"I shall be very glad," Father Austin replied. "Come when you like."

"That will be often!" Marsden said with a smile.

As he was putting on his coat in the little hall, the doctor said:

"I'll bet Superintendent Meldrum has gone to bed by now!"

Superintendent Meldrum was *not* in bed even then. He was sitting in his room at Scotland Yard looking malevolently at the telephone instrument as if it had been responsible for the things he had heard from Inspector Pierce, who was then at a police-station in Devonshire. These things were: that Warbrick's mother had not been ill; that Warbrick had not been seen; and that ex-Superintendent Gilmartin was not to be found.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FINAL TOUCHES

WHEN Superintendent Meldrum's subordinates arrived at Scotland Yard on the following morning they did not find the usual good-humoured, rather lazy chief to whom they were accustomed. They were, however, prepared for him, the man in the little cubby-hole at the entrance having told each of them as he came in that the "Big Drum" was already there before them and he had been in his office till the small hours of the morning.

"Phew!" said one of them. "We're for it to-day!"

They were! Each of them was received in the same way. The superintendent sat at his desk, nodded to each as he came in for instructions, then chose a slip of paper—sometimes two slips—and handed it—or them—to the officer before him.

"Read that!"

The officer would read the slip—or slips—and look up expectantly.

"Clear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good! Get on with it and look alive!"

The detective would then leave the room with his slip of paper feeling like a schoolboy burdened with an unjust imposition.

A detective sergeant, temporarily taking the place of the absent Pierce, was treated with a little more consideration, though not with the bonhomie usually to be expected from the superintendent.

"I'm fed up with this case," the latter told him. "We've made one bloomer already, and for all I know we may be about to make another. Now, I've given everybody detailed written instructions what to do, and I expect everybody to do exactly as I've said—no more and no less—and to do it to-day. Whether I make an arrest or not depends to a great extent on the reports I get from you fellows. I want you to see that they are all in by, say, four o'clock, and having digested them yourself, to report to me here."

"Very good, sir."

Having dispatched his myrmidons on their various missions, Meldrum wrote on a final slip of paper: "*Self*:—See Records"; and then, after a moment's thought: "See Parson Bill and Miss Cresswell." Then he got up from his chair and stretched himself.

On his way out of the office he called in at the Records Office, and saw the inspector in charge.

"I've got a job for you, Beale," he said: "I wonder if you could do it urgently. It won't be easy."

"What is it?"

"You know Parson Bill?"

The inspector nodded?"

"I would like you to look up his convictions and to find out if at any time when he was in prison there was anybody in the same gaol remanded or convicted on a charge of poisoning."

"That's an easy one," Inspector Beale said; "I'll do that myself. Just sit down while I look it up."

Meldrum, of course, knew the wonderful system of filing and cross-reference devised by "Records," but he was surprised at the rapidity with which his request was satisfied. It was only a few minutes later that Beale placed before him a card.

"That's the only one," the inspector said. "Bill

was at Plymouth for one of his usual jobs and this fellow Baker was there awaiting trial at the same time."

Meldrum looked at the card and whistled.

"Hum," he said, more to himself than to Beale. "Called himself Baker then, did he? Curious kink, that! Thanks, Beale. Can I have this card for an hour or so? Good!"

Half an hour later saw him knocking at the door of Ma Slater's "Boarding House for Single Gents". A girl—just as neatly dressed as many of her sisters in more exalted service—told him that "Mr. Courtney" was in and asked him to wait in a "parlour" of surpassing ugliness but spotless cleanliness. When "Mr. Courtney" appeared, Meldrum, in spite of his sombre humour, was amused at the apprehensive expression which crossed his face at sight of his visitor—an expression which was, however, modified considerably when the superintendent greeted him with an outstretched hand.

"Good morning, Bill," Meldrum said. "You seem to be very comfortable here."

"Very, Mr. Meldrum, very," Parson Bill replied. "Ma Slater is a self-respecting woman and insists on refined surroundings."

"I have come to you for some information, Bill," the superintendent said at once.

"If it is of the sort that I can conscientiously give, Mr. Meldrum," Bill replied, "I shall be glad to give it."

"Oh, I am not going to ask you to shop any of your pals," Meldrum assured him, "so I think your conscience can have a little rest."

"Then, sir, what is it you require?" Bill asked.

Meldrum smiled.

"How much nicer that sounds than 'What do

you want?' does," he commented, "though it means the same thing."

Parson Bill said nothing, but waited for the question.

"Do you remember," Meldrum asked, "how you left me suddenly the other day?"

"Yes, sir, and I apologise for it," Bill replied. "I saw somebody I wanted to get hold of."

"Did you get hold of him?"

"No."

"I gathered at the time that it was somebody you didn't exactly love," Meldrum went on.

"You gathered correctly, Mr. Meldrum," was Bill's reply. "The dirty dog gave me the slip."

"Did this dirty dog ever answer to the name of Baker?"

"That's the only name I ever knew him to have," Parson Bill replied. "I'd like to lay my hands on him. I've got a promise to keep with regard to that insect."

"Oh?"

"Yes, I promised a pal—now unhappily in retirement—that if I ever came across Baker I would do him considerable physical injury—and, Mr. Meldrum, old as I am, I propose to keep that promise."

"I doubt it, Bill, I doubt it," the superintendent said. "Oh, I don't doubt your ability, Bill, it's only that I have got first call on him, and when I've finished with him, the hangman will have something to say to him."

"Eh?" Bill forgot his gentility of accent in his excitement. "Not for that job you pinched the doctor for?"

"Yes."

As he spoke the superintendent took a card from his pocket and handed it to Bill.

Parson Bill took the card, on which were pasted

two photographs—one full face and the other in profile—of a man in prison dress.

“That’s the fellow, isn’t it?” Meldrum asked.

“That’s him!” Bill pronounced at once. “Where can I find him, Mr. Meldrum? For the love of Mike let me see him for one minute before you get him!”

“Wait a minute, Bill, wait a minute,” Meldrum restrained the ex-convict. “I haven’t finished with you yet. Tell me where did you meet this fellow originally.”

“The first and only time I met him was when he was waitin’ trial an’ I was ditto. That was at the old Plymouth gaol, Mr. Meldrum, the time Baker was up for poisoning that girl. You remember?”

“I know the case,” Meldrum replied, “but only at second-hand. It was the Devon police that handled it.”

“Mishandled it, you mean, sir,” Bill corrected him. “If they’d done their job properly he’d’ve swung instead o’ gettin’ a measly five-stretch for manslaughter. It was murder! My pal—the one I made the promise to—told me all about it. My pal was goin’ to marry that girl.”

“I see. Well, Bill, I want you to promise me that if you do come across Baker, you’ll postpone the hiding you want to give him. He’s my meat and he’ll hang.”

“Well, sir, as you put it like that I s’pose I’ll have to promise,” Bill agreed, “though I don’t suppose I’d meet him again. I go out very seldom nowadays.”

“By the way, Bill,” Meldrum asked, “what are you doing these days for a living—if it’s not an indiscreet question?”

“I am writing a book, sir,” was the proud reply, with a return to the “refined” accent—“a book of my experiences which has been commissioned

by the firm of Kenny and Coles. You will find your name in it, Mr. Meldrum, mentioned very favourably indeed."

"Oh, help!" the superintendent laughed. "Well best of luck, Bill, and thanks!"

Meldrum went from Ma Slater's to Joan Cresswell's flat, where he was lucky enough to find the girl in.

"I have come," he said, "to ask you one or two questions, Miss Cresswell, which may seem to you impertinent, but the answers will be very important to me."

"Yes?"

"Have you," Meldrum asked then, "during the past few months ever received letters professing love for you from a person other than Mr. Corbell-Manners?"

"Yes," the girl answered promptly, "but they were unsigned."

"Hum! Anonymous letters! Have you any suspicion as to who wrote them?"

"I—er—have a vague suspicion, but it is only guesswork. I shouldn't like to say definitely, but . . ."

Meldrum placed before her the card he had shown to Parson Bill.

"That," he said with certainty in his tones, "is the man you suspect of writing them. In fact, you know it."

"Yes, but——"

"I know, I know," Meldrum interrupted; "so was mine only a guess! It was a good one, though! If I may say so, yours is a little more than a guess, for whereas I have only seen the fellow's writing once to my knowledge and have not seen his letters to you, you on the other hand, have seen both more than once."

Joan said nothing to this.

"Why didn't you tell me about this?" Meldrum asked.

"There didn't seem to be any reason why I should," the girl replied. "Now, of course, that you have spoken of the matter I can see that there may be something in it, but no, Mr. Meldrum, there can't be! Don't forget the same old difficulty as with all your other suspects."

"What is that?"

"Opportunity," Joan replied, "the opportunity to make the substitution and the opportunity to get the germs."

"I am bearing that in mind, Miss Cresswell."

The Meldrum who returned to Scotland Yard was a more genial individual than the one who had left it earlier in the day. He came humming into his office, but the hum died suddenly at sight of a yellow envelope on the table. He picked it up and tore it open. It was a telegram, handed in that morning at Exeter.

He read:

*Arriving evening express with Pierce Warbrick
stop Request meet us Marsden's surgery seven stop
Have wired Marsden stop First look up record John
Baker 1927 stop Gilmartin.*

Meldrum sat down at his desk and laughed.

"Good old Larry!" he exclaimed. "Won't he get a shock when he finds that I've got there first!"

Suddenly the laugh came to an abrupt end.

"Warbrick!" he said to himself. "That fellow gets my goat!"

He lifted the telephone receiver and called "Records."

"Beale, have you got anything in your department about a certain Doctor Cedric Warbrick?"

Yes, that's the fellow! You have? Will you send it along? By the way, do you know that they called him 'The Poisoner'? You do? Do you know why? What? It's all in the file? Damn! Why didn't I ask you before?"

He listened for a moment in silence.

"I know. I know," he went on then. "We don't use 'Records' intelligently enough? I know; you've said all that before, Beale. Don't rub it in."

CHAPTER XXIX

ENDS MEET

MARSDEN was sitting in the consulting-room of his Audrey Street surgery. In front of him on his blotting-pad he had flattened out a telegram.

"I wonder what it's all about," he said for perhaps the tenth time.

After a little he pressed a bell-button and Carpenter the dispenser appeared.

"I should be obliged, Carpenter," the doctor said, "if you would postpone your evening walk for a few minutes to-day."

He looked at his watch.

"In five minutes," he continued, "some friends will come to see me—five of them, I think. Please show them in here as soon as they arrive. Then you can go for your constitutional if you wish."

"Very good, sir," the dispenser replied. "Will you not be requiring some refreshment?"

"No, Carpenter, thanks. This is to be a business talk—not a social function."

"Very good, sir."

There were still a few minutes to go to the hour when Marsden heard the sound of a car arriving at the front of the house, and a moment later the scuffle of feet in the hall told of the entrance of several people.

"Is the doctor in?" he heard in Meldrum's booming voice.

"Yes, sir," the dispenser's voice followed.

There was further scuffling, louder this time—the

floor of the hall was bare boards— and then the door from the waiting-room was opened to reveal the superintendent's large form. Meldrum advanced smiling.

"I've shown myself in," he said in a voice that suggested that he was out of breath, and then he made way for Gilmartin.

"Good evening, Doctor Marsden," the latter said. "May I introduce Inspector Pierce—oh, you have met before? This—er—gentleman's name is Baker."

The "er—gentleman" referred to was an undersized individual of decidedly rustic appearance, who seemed to be very frightened indeed. Pierce held him by the wrist. Marsden looked at the couple in astonishment which increased as he saw who was entering behind them.

"Hello, Warbrick," he said, however. "I didn't know that *you* were to be the fifth in this party."

"I don't suppose you did," was the reply of the little doctor with the large head. "I hope you don't mind. It seems that I'm a necessary evil here."

"Don't be an ass, Warbrick," Marsden said. "You're as welcome here as any of the others."

"There are seats enough for everybody," he continued. "Won't you all sit down?"

They obeyed. Pierce and Baker sat side-by-side on a sofa.

Meldrum cleared his throat.

"Well, Doctor Marsden," he said, "you must be wondering why we are all here. It wasn't my idea. In fact, it's entirely out of order; but my friend Gilmartin thought that as you have been

involved in so much disagreeable publicity, we owed it to you to come here and let you know before anybody else that the whole affair is cleared up."

"Cleared up?" Marsden exclaimed. "You mean you've——"

"I mean that we have arrested the murderer of James Murdoch."

Marsden drew a long breath, but said nothing.

"No doubt," Meldrum went on, "you would like to know the whole story. I can't tell it to you in its entirety, as I have only met these other people at Paddington. However, I'll start with this: The killing of James Murdoch was an accident!"

"Accident? But I thought you said that you had arrested the murd——"

"Yes, yes, yes, it was an accident, but it was also murder—murder by accident, in fact. Ah, I see you've got my meaning. In other words the germs that killed Murdoch were intended for somebody else."

"Yes."

"Then it was Miss Fa——"

"No," Meldrum interrupted, "it was not Miss Farquhar. She's much too intelligent a girl to do a thing like that. In a nutshell, this is what happened: It came to the knowledge of a person who has already shown homicidal tendencies that Miss Cresswell and Mr. Corbell-Manners were in love; then that Mr. Corbell-Manners had had a serious accident and that you were his doctor; later that you talked of giving him some sort of an injection of serum. Now, our homicidal friend seems to have been nourishing what the novelists call a hopeless

passion for Miss Cresswell, and though he had never dared to tell her openly that he loved her he seems to have given her one or two hints of it and to have sent her anonymous letters declaring his love. He determined to remove an unconscious rival, and so, being peculiarly qualified to do so, he decided to use what he considered an absolutely fool-proof method of killing. He made a culture from the spittle—now, in presence of two medical men, I won't pretend to be accurate in this—from the spittle of one of Doctor Marsden's pneumonia patients, and by a very simple dodge managed to get it into one of the phials of serum. As we know, Doctor Marsden did not inoculate Mr. Corbell-Manners, but he did inoculate Murdoch, the journalist. Murdoch was therefore killed by accident, but, as you know, such an accident is murder none the less."

"We know that," Marsden said, "but who on earth is this madman—for he must be mad?"

"His real name is Baker," Meldrum replied.

The little man on the sofa moved uneasily and seemed about to speak, but Inspector Pierce jogged his arm and whispered, "Shut up, you!"

"And," Meldrum went on with no more than a glance in their direction, "I have no doubt that in a way he *is* mad, but not mad enough to come under the definition of insane. The curious part of the whole story is this: Baker would have been perfectly safe from detection if he had not moved after his realisation that he had killed the wrong man; but he did, nevertheless, get into a sort of panic. I will give him the credit for wishing to get hold of the phial of——"

"I don't," Doctor Warbrick interrupted.

"We have no evidence either way," Meldrum continued, "and I give him the credit because I can't prove the contrary. At any rate, Doctor Marsden does not seem to have given him a chance of getting hold of it. I don't pretend to understand his actions after this. My theory is that he got frightened that Doctor Marsden would discover that his serum had been tampered with and would draw the correct conclusion. Then this euthanasia controversy came along, and Doctor Marsden, having taken part in it, gave unconsciously a good opportunity for writing the anonymous letter to Barshott—one of his patients, and therefore likely in this weather to be treated by him for a cold. The letter to Scotland Yard was an elaboration—due to the stupidity of the too clever criminal."

"What about the letter to me?" Marsden asked.

"I think that was an afterthought," Meldrum said, "due to the fact that you were known to be in favour of a marriage between Miss Cresswell and young Corbell-Manners."

"I don't understand all this," Marsden said. "Who is this Baker who has all the necessary knowledge to make cultures, who seems to know my private opinions on everything, who types a letter to me——"

"On a typewriter you used yourself!" Meldrum finished.

Marsden looked open-mouthed at the superintendent.

"Used myself?" he echoed. "I didn't use any type-wr—oh, I see now. I borrowed Joan's

typewriter to do a piece of work and then found that it was one that I couldn't use for the purpose."

"Quite! It was in your possession for some days."

"Yes, but—Baker? You can't mean my——" Marsden looked in bewilderment at the man sitting beside Pierce, and then back at Meldrum.

"This is Baker's brother," the superintendent said, "and an accessory——"

"Oi didden knaw!" the man on the sofa cried. "It worn't moy fault. Jack wrote to Oi an'——"

"Shut up!" said Pierce.

"This is the brother of Baker," Meldrum repeated, "and Baker now goes under the name of—another trade——"

"Not Carpenter?" Marsden exclaimed.

"Yes."

Marsden said not a word, but those present saw what is perhaps the most pitiable expression to be seen on a sensitive face—the realisation that he has been the victim of the basest ingratitude.

"Yes," Meldrum repeated, "Carpenter, your dispenser—the man you helped when he was down and out."

"Out of prison," Warbrick added.

Marsden looked round the room. He looked dazed.

"How did you find out all this?" he asked then. "How do you come into this, Warbrick?"

"I've been in it a long time," Warbrick replied. "You see, Marsden, I knew Baker—or Carpenter—in prison, and he also happens to be a fellow-townsmen of mine."

“ In prison ? ”

Warbrick laughed.

“ I thought everybody knew Poisoner Warbrick, as the lags always called me,” he said. “ I have spent more years than I like to think of as a prison doctor.”

“ Why didn’t you tell me about Carpenter ? ” Marsden asked.

“ Why ? Because, though I hate the criminal class, I thought I owed this fellow a chance to rise. I was a fool ! His type doesn’t rise ! A poisoner is—just Poison ! I warned him, however, the first time I met him round here, to mind his step. I told him that I had my eye on him, but he was too quick for me—the filthy devil ! ”

The ugly face was uglier still as anger welled up within the little doctor.

“ When you were arrested, Marsden,” he went on, “ I was certain that you were incapable of such an act and I suspected your dispenser merely because of his former record. If I had thought that the police didn’t know who he was, I should have opened their eyes for them without hesitation. However, no matter what I thought of the police ! I set about looking for proof of Baker’s guilt. I got the keys cut and came in here and searched the place. In the kitchen—of all places in the world—I found a bottle of enough *pneumococci* to infect the whole country and two hypodermic syringes.”

“ Then it wasn’t you who knocked out Peters ? ” Meldrum asked.

“ I don’t know who Peters is,” the doctor replied. “ No, that was Baker. He evidently suspected

something, and saw your man—I didn't know then that he was your man—come in. He must have followed him in. I heard the racket outside the door and skipped out through the kitchen window and home. Then I took out my car and came round this way to see if I could find out what had happened; I found this fellow in the gutter. The Catholic priest came along——”

“ I know that part of it,” Meldrum interrupted “ But why didn't you come round to the Yard with that bottle? ”

“ I was going to,” Warbrick replied, “ but with due respect to you all, my mother is more important to me than such things. By the time I had found out what was in the bottle I got a telegram signed apparently by my mother's doctor saying that she was very ill; so I dropped everything and went down to Devonshire. When I got there I went straight to her doctor and found that my mother was perfectly well and that no telegram had been sent by him. I immediately thought of Baker—who must have noticed the absence of his precious bottle and syringes, and wanted to get me out of the way in order to steal them back or destroy them. The police got them first, and probably thought I was the guilty one.”

Meldrum squirmed at the thought of the fortunately unexecuted warrant.

“ However,” Warbrick went on, “ I knew what to look for, and I found that thing over there—Baker's brother, and discovered, simultaneously with Mr. Gilmartin, that he had sent the wire, at his brother's request.”

"Oi didden know!" the "thing over there" wailed. "Twurtn't nuthin' to do with Oi!"

"Shut up!" Warbrick snapped. "You knew the sort of no-good your brother was!"

"Us is disgraced by he!" Baker moaned.

"You're a bad lot—all you Bakers!" the little doctor yapped. "I hope you hang."

"I didn't suspect your dispenser," Meldrum declared, "till I saw the labels on those new bottles in your dispensary. The block capitals were exactly those of the anonymous letters. Father Austin noticed them too."

"I seem to have been all sorts of a fool!" Marsden said. "My carelessness has been at the root of it all. I cannot imagine, though, how Carpenter—or Baker, as you call him—got at my serum."

"It's a matter of two minutes," Warbrick said. "You can't guard against that sort of thing Marsden. At a guess I would say that you left your bag lying here in this room while you went out of the room, perhaps for two minutes, say, to escort somebody to the door. A natural thing to do. Baker has two syringes ready, one full of his culture and the other empty. He sucks up your serum with one, puts in the germs with the other and the job is done! Don't worry about it, Marsden!"

"Thanks, Warbrick," Marsden replied. "You have been very decent to me over all this. I'm afraid I haven't been as neighbourly to you as I——"

"Rot! Rot!" the little doctor interrupted gruffly, embarrassed for the first time. "There's nothing wrong with *you*! It's me! Unsociable

devil! Damn fool! Drink too much! However, that's finished! Shake hands on it! Glad you're all clear! See you again! G'night!"

They let him go.

"But—but—where is Carpenter—Baker?" Marsden asked.

"Oh, he's all right," Meldrum replied. "My fellows picked him up when he let us in."

CHAPTER XXX

THE END

GILMARTIN was sitting with Father Austin.

"Yes," he was saying, "a very fine letter, that one of Marsden's. The *Epoch* had a good editorial on it too."

"Yes."

"It's no easy job to recant like that," Gilmartin went on. "I know that I'd find it a devil of a job to do it publicly, I mean."

"It's certainly not agreeable," the priest replied, "but Marsden is intellectually honest."

"I suppose," the ex-detective said, "that you are to a great extent responsible for his change of front."

"I have my share, no doubt," Father Austin answered, "but I think Barshott's brother's friend has done more than anybody else by proving that they were all mistaken in their diagnosis of Mrs. Marsden's complaint, and by putting her on her feet again."

"Oh, by the way," the ex-superintendent said, "I saw Barshott this morning. He is getting on wonderfully. You know that we have renewed our acquaintanceship. He seems to think that he owes his life to me merely because I went to see his brother at Oxford. He is coming down to Cornwall in a week's time to convalesce."

The priest nodded absently.

"Yes," he murmured. "So they condemned Carpenter—or Baker—to death!"

"Yes?"

"Poor unhappy creature!"

"We'll leave it at that," Gilmartin said, "and by the by, I am not in the least bit proud of my part in that show. I'm going to stay in Cornwall and grow shallots in future."

Father Austin smiled. Gilmartin had said this so often before.

"You did your part," the priest told him. "I admired old Meldrum's evidence. It was clever of him to deduce the infatuation of the dispenser for Miss Cresswell from the poetic effusion he found on the table."

"Very clever!" Gilmartin laughed. "Especially as the name Joan appeared about six times in that poetic effusion."

"Oh, I didn't know that."

"I am rather interested," the ex-superintendent said, "in the fate of the person who was responsible for all this trouble."

"Who? What do you mean?"

"Oh, I am speaking loosely, of course," Gilmartin rejoined. "I mean Elisabeth Clifford, the woman who killed her aunt because she was incurably ill."

"Oh, yes. Well, I cannot, of course, say that I hope she will be acquitted, but I shall be glad to see her get off with very slight punishment. I should think that she will, for, after all, she is an ignorant woman and did wrong fully convinced that she was doing good."

There was a ring at the front-door bell, and a moment later Joan Cresswell was shown in. She

was radiant with youth and health—and something more.

“Oh!” she exclaimed. “Mr Gilmartin here too! I’m glad. I came to tell you my news. The first thing is that Doris Farquhar—you know Doris—is going to be married to a big Harley Street specialist.”

“Good!” Gilmartin applauded.

“My real big news is more exciting,” the girl went on somewhat breathlessly. “Lord Urblestone has given in suddenly, and Peter and I are going to be married.”

“Congratulations!” both men said together

“I wish you every happiness,” Father Austin added.

“I would like you to marry us, Father,” Joan said shyly now. “Peter, you know, is a Catholic, and I—well, I’m not far from it, am I?”

The priest smiled.

“I hope not,” he said. “When is the great event to take place?”

“In three months. There is such a lot to settle before we can get on with it.”

“Well,” Father Austin said, “if I am alive and well in three months I shall be very glad to officiate.”

“Oh, thanks, Father Austin,” Joan exclaimed, and then turned to Gilmartin. “You will of course come to the wedding,” she said. “I know that Peter would be very disappointed if you were not there.”

Gilmartin laughed.

“That means a wedding-present,” he said. “Yes,

I will come, but you must warn Peter that on the day I receive the card of invitation I will order for him the best fairy-cycle that is made. I wouldn't trust him with anything faster on the road."

Father Austin chuckled.

"Don't worry," he said. "I think that Miss Cresswell is going to drive the car in the future."

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* This title will be published in April 1937

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